

Editorial

We are happy to bring out this issue of SAAPE Bulletin after a considerable time gap and with your cooperation we hope to regularise the publication to be a vehicle to build contacts, share news and events, analysis of current event of special significance and improve information networking etc.

Since the last bulletin was published, several changes have occurred in the South Asian region and globally. The changes in the socio-political context defined SAAPE's response and intervention to the issues and concerns though the basic nature of SAAPE programmes and activities do not radically depart from the previous year. However, the changing socio-political reality necessitated a certain shift in emphasis to enable SAAPE to be relevant and meaningful in its intervention in responding to the rapidly changing situation.

SAAPE as a regional alliance always strived to develop regional perspectives on issues – rather than create a motley collection of national views placed in proximity. This understanding also encompassed the fundamental concern of SAAPE, that of poverty eradication. This understanding flowed out of a comprehension that despite recent history and political structures, most countries in South Asia were not just geographically contiguous but linked in numerous other ways too. They share natural resources, eco-systems, often natural markets, and at least sub-economies in the traditional sectors of survival, subsistence, and sustenance production. This is in addition to the linguistic and cultural similarities that cross borders and boundaries. SAAPE therefore believed that whatever the view of the regimes, no problems of the people of South Asia could be tackled in national isolation. It was therefore important to have regional – South Asian perspective on most issues. Obviously this does not mean that specificities that may coincide with national boundaries – including ones caused by official policies – are irrelevant or insignificant. These occur within different areas within the different countries as well – depending on various natural, social, and cultural factors. Such a regional perspective was the basis of the real and concrete cooperation and solidarity between the people of South Asia – though they may be citizens of different nations – to face and solve the varied problems of their lives in a united manner.

The focus during the formative stage of SAAPE nevertheless had to be on the creation and consolidation of SAAPE fraternity at the national levels. SAAPE needed to establish a presence, project its broad perspective, and gather together individuals and organisations who would participate in SAAPE activities as they subscribed to the broad perspective. There was also another factor – based in the real conditions obtaining in South Asia. Direct contacts – particularly meetings – between people from different countries in the region are difficult. Travel is expensive, sometimes cumbersome, and often impossible. Exchange visits, bilateral meetings, or regional meetings were thus not very easy – and sometimes nearly impossible. Substantive contacts were hence

limited to the general assemblies of SAAPE and such similar events – say the Social Forum/s etc. The major work during this period was hence around national activities and associations. This was crucial during the formative years.

The country work and country organisational emphasis however slowed down to some extent the projection of a regional, South Asian perspective. The poverty reports too essentially presented national scenarios while the introductions emphasized the similarities and divergences in the processes, structures, and policies.

Change in perspectives and methods of intervention

In 2004 SAAPE took a significant and slightly different step. It decided to concentrate on 5 themes in its work. The themes were Food Sovereignty, Gender, Labour, Peace and Disarmament, and Democracy and Just Governance. The overarching concern of course was poverty eradication. The Thematic Work was to take place within the context of poverty eradication and was to relate the specific topic to this overarching concern. The Thematic Work was conceived as regional work, and not a summation of country level activities. With this aim in view a Regional Thematic Focal Organisation for each theme was elected. Country level Thematic Focal Organisations were also identified. The country level thematic organisations were to relate to and link up with thematic focal organisations from other countries working on the same theme as well as to the Regional Thematic Focal Organisation. However, due to various reasons the regional thematic groups did not materialise in many cases. The country level thematic focal organisations worked under the umbrella of the Country Focal Organisations not necessarily relating to the theme at a regional level.

The Core Committee of SAAPE meeting before the Annual General Meeting of 2007 discussed the issue in detail. It was felt and decided that the activities of SAAPE should now be thematic rather than country centred. It was also felt that the campaigns that SAAPE launches should be

theme based in addition to the general common campaign that may be taken up by all. The Annual General Meeting approved this decision. The thematic groups would now be the active elements in SAAPE. The thematic focal organisations from all countries, coordinated by the regional thematic focal organisations will create regional perspectives – as position papers for each theme. The process will include creation of country position papers that will then be synthesized to create the regional position paper. The thematic groups will be the active elements spreading across the countries. The Communications Officers too will be based with regional thematic organisations rather than with country focal organisations. The different thematic groups from each country will also coordinate and collaborate with each other to create the country level process of SAAPE activities. Thus the SAAPE activities – in all their dimensions will now have a regional perspective and will be theme centred. The inculcation of new members and expansion of SAAPE membership base too will now be the responsibility of the Thematic Groups. Thus the politics, organisational structure as well as the activities of SAAPE will be led by the thematic groups that will also communicate and collaborate among themselves to continuously refine and sharpen the overarching perspective.

The SAAPE Bulletin will henceforth reflect this new thought and pattern of activities. It will consist of an editorial analytical note relating to the overarching perspective of eradication of poverty. The newsletter will carry summary of developments within the region as they relate to the concerns of the thematic work. Apart from this the newsletter will of course carry reports of activities of the different thematic groups. Each issue in addition will focus on one major event organised by SAAPE and the concerns of one thematic group. It will also attempt to serve as the link for the campaigns taken up or planned by different thematic groups.

We hope you enjoy reading this Bulletin. We are always be happy to receive your comments and feedback, in order to further improve the SAAPE Bulletin.

South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)

Annual General Meeting 2007

on the theme

Poverty Eradication by Strengthening Struggles for Peace, Justice and Food Sovereignty in South Asia

29-30 July, Kathmandu, Nepal

Socio-Political Context

The South Asian region has 23 per cent of the world's population and 43 per cent of the world's poor and undernourished people with low life expectancy, low literacy rate and higher degree of gender inequality. The major underlying causes of poverty are exclusion, gender discrimination and patriarchy, ineffective governance, corporate globalisation, emergencies/disasters, deprivation of entitlements that obstructs people from social, economic and political opportunities, and non-economic aspects – powerlessness and exclusion.

Eradication of poverty to ensure a human, humane, and dignified life to all people of the world, and particularly of South Asia involves above all a control of the people themselves over natural and human created resources. This is possible only when the people can take informed and deliberative decisions without coercion, fear, or prejudice about the utilisation of these resources from the local to the national and hopefully in the foreseeable future at the regional level. The precondition of such a situation is upholding the desirability and principle of peace that can only be realised through the actualisation of justice with democracy, equality and strengthening the principles of secularism.

Thus struggle for Food Sovereignty is another issue that is most relevant in the South Asian context. The uncritical approach to globalisation under the disguise of market economy has challenged the food sovereignty of smaller countries and developing economies. The effects of globalisation have been devastating. The crises in agriculture continues to deepen under

the onslaught of corporate globalisation and the neo-liberal political vision that tries to remould the countryside under the logic of market fundamentalism thus undermining food security and survival of the rural poor. Within the existing market paradigm the peasantry will continue to face ruin and the spectre of suicide will haunt them, as globalisation reduces land to a commodity for capital accumulation and profit over livelihood.

In this socio-political context, the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) organised its 2007 AGM on the theme of "Poverty Eradication by Strengthening Struggle for Peace, Justice and Food Sovereignty in South Asia". The objectives of this AGM were to share the experiences of the struggles taking place in different parts of South Asia, plan strategies for the year ahead; and to consolidate people's struggles for peace, justice and food sovereignty to eradicate poverty.

It was attended by over 170 likeminded civil society members from grassroots, social, mass-based movements comprising women's movements, trade unions, human rights organizations, peasants' organizations, academia and NGOs covering all the SAARC countries including partners from the North viz. Eurostep and the Europe External Policy Advisors (EEPA) based in Brussels, Belgium.

The AGM was inaugurated by Ms. Sahana Pradhan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal who focused and stressed on the role of the civil society in partnership with governments towards achieving the goal of poverty eradication in the region. The opening of the AGM shared the experiences of people's struggles and successes

taking place in South Asian societies in areas of peace, justice and food sovereignty contributing to poverty eradication in South Asia. The existing and strongly emerging anti-people trends of neo-liberalism, corporate globalization, exclusion, militarization, fundamentalism, gender injustice, armed conflict, erosion of democracy, labour exploitation, unjust access to natural resources and feminisation of poverty as opposed to pro-poor and people-friendly development policies lacking in the South Asian governments were the major common issues shared by the participants. It was underscored by all present that the current development model, centred on robust economic growth by South Asian governments, only marginalises and excludes the poor from the whole development process and does not contribute to poverty eradication.

The two-day deliberations aimed to explore the means and way forward towards a people-oriented and people-led development agenda by consolidating and strengthening existing people's struggles for peace, justice and food sovereignty contributing towards poverty eradication in South Asia.

SAAPE AGM Communiqué

We, the participants of the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) Annual General Meeting held in Kathmandu on 29-30 July 2007, representing various civil society groups, social movements, mass organizations, trade unions, professional societies and NGOs from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka reaffirm our commitment to the full realisation of peace, justice and food sovereignty in South Asia. We strongly believe that:

1. A growing democratic deficit is starkly noticed in almost all countries of South Asia. This deficit has been accentuated by both internal and external factors;
2. The internal factor that was clearly manifested in the entire region was the growing subservience of the ruling elite to the tenets of dogmatic neo-liberalism; and in all countries of the region, local and global hegemonic forces are creating conflicts, militarization, exclusion and growing sense of insecurity among the people;

The major decisions endorsed and approved by the AGM 2007 are as follows:

1. Make AGM a smaller event of about 20 international delegates only.
2. The General Assembly will be held once in every three years with larger participation.
3. Financial support for the activities has been ensured for the year 2007-2008 work plan has been made accordingly.
4. Recruit full time coordinator, exclusively for SAAPE, by January 2008.
5. Station communication officers in the RTFOs to work as extended arms of the Regional Secretariat
6. SAAPE Secretariat will remain in Kathmandu as Kathmandu is the most convenient place in terms of access and cost.
7. Core committee meetings will be held twice a year, excluding the AGM.
8. Membership to be based along the themes and not country focused as there is no country focal point any more. RTFOs to take initiative for expanding the network and take new members.
9. For the wider dissemination of national issues to the region, firstly RTFOs may send the materials to the Secretariat and then the Secretariat will facilitate for further required work.
10. Regional thematic assembly will take place every year, participated by members of the respective theme. These assemblies are to be organised by RTFOs, facilitated by the Regional Secretariat
11. SAAPE has to be registered and accredited to the SAARC Secretariat. The Regional Secretariat would take this initiative. It also needs to have SAAPE statute before getting it registered to the appropriate authority.

12. The Communication Officers based at the RTFOs may be assigned to work at the Secretariat for three months on a rotation basis to help the Secretariat and get acquainted with the SAAPE work. It can be considered as internship at the Secretariat.
13. It was decided to continue the People's SAARC initiatives. For the facilitation of necessary preparations for 2008 People's SAARC, a preparatory committee has been formed comprising Ajit Muricken, Karamat Ali, Mohiuddin Ahmad, Mohamed Zuhair, Babu Mathew, Rokeya Kabir, and two persons from the SAAPE Regional secretariat. The preparations should start well in advance and the People's SAARC process/event must be as inclusive as possible
14. The preparatory meeting of the committee for People's SAARC 2008 should be organised two-three months prior to the People's SAARC 2008 event.
15. SAAPE also has to engage in the specific country process for peace initiatives. Therefore, a specific task force has been constituted to conceptualise the idea of SAAPE's engagement. Persons responsible are as follows;
 - a. For Sri Lanka –Karamat Ali
 - b. For Pakistan –Mohiuddin Ahmad,
 - c. For Bangladesh –Zakia Jowher,
 - d. For Bhutan –Ajit Muricken and Sandeep Pendse

These concepts should be developed within 2 weeks time from the AGM date (i.e., within 15th of August 2007) and circulated for feedbacks, suggestions and actions.
16. Almost all the political decisions regarding specific SAAPE themes should be made by the given RTFOs in consultation with members of respective themes. The Regional Secretariat will facilitate.
17. Each thematic group should undertake at least one campaign of regional significance.
18. Tentative date and venue of the next Core Committee meeting is - January 2008 in Maldives (prior to the official SAARC event).
19. For participation in AGMs in the coming years, based on the membership and contribution to SAAPE, equal representation of male and female participants is to be ensured.
20. SAAPE will have a rotating chair from January 2008.

3. As a consequence, there has been an unprecedented drain on natural resources of the region. The overall result is increased destitution in the countryside. The landless are driven out of the rural economy as the corporate logic of globalised agriculture replaces labour and offers no employment opportunities. The rural economy with the destruction of sustenance and sustainable agriculture is unable to accommodate the poor. They are, therefore, forced to migrate to the urban centres to suffer further. They migrate as penniless poor with no adequate skills required in urban areas. As new immigrants, they have no access to any

welfare and security services, obviously, their food sovereignty is virtually destroyed;

5. Water, land, food, forests, seeds, biodiversity and culture are common assets of humanity for present and future generations. We strongly believe that people have the right to safe food, continuously, free from genetic modification;
6. Food sovereignty at the family, society, national, regional and international levels is a basic human right. In this regard, scientific land reforms assuring peasants' access to and control over land resources are fundamental requirements, along with the protection of indigenous knowledge system

and practices. The age-old practises and knowledge systems of our people preserved soil fertility, evolution of sensible ways and means to conserve water and forests. The current development trends threaten these historic gains and achievements of our people;

7. The plunder, reminiscent of the days of colonial rule, has serious manifestations on climate change. National governments are allowing the exploitation of mineral wealth, oceanic wealth, forest wealth, genetic wealth and all forms of natural endowments in the name of market reform, undermining the rights of the people to these resources;
8. Failures in agrarian reforms, egalitarian distribution of resources, development of infrastructure and provision of health and child-care facilities have taken gender-specific forms. Livelihood resources for women have dwindled and new ways of curtailing their consumption have emerged even as the commodity market expands and proliferates. At the same time, women have become the objects of numerous unsustainable development interventions. Women in the labour market have not been either fully or partially in control of the incomes they generate and what should have been their purchasing power. Women still do not participate substantively in the political-public domain or in the non-state juridical domain of local decision-making and arbitration;
9. The absence of peace is evident everywhere in South Asia, encompassing the political, economic, social, communal, ethnic, class, caste, and gender arenas, all of which are interconnected. This absence of peace and proliferations of conflicts is the pretext being used by South Asian governments to suspend democratic exercises and curtail human rights of citizens. Democracy and a democratic culture are at their worst; militarism and militarization are at their height. The global powers under the imperialistic leadership of USA government, still chants the song of "War on Terror" to implement its agenda of domination and denial;
10. The present system exploits each and every situation of crises for taking away democratic rights and substituting with draconian powers and crushing civil liberties, eroding human rights, branding all dissents as 'terrorism', instituting new curbs on freedom of expression, breeding xenophobia urging to eliminate the 'other'. All these tendencies entail gross denial of justice and growing violations of democracy, human rights and the right to self-determination;
11. A holistic understanding of peace has to be discovered by rejecting the current dominant culture of war and cultivating the culture of peace. Peace is a pre-condition for fullness of dignified life. Human beings can become fully human only in the condition of peace. Creativity, spirituality, individual and collective achievements attain glory in the climate of peace;
12. Justice is the pre-condition for peace. We hasten to add that the war against poverty cannot be achieved through pious platitudes contained in such hypocritical pronouncements as the MDGs. The true solution lies in respecting the sovereignty and autonomy of each community to plan its own future using its own resources, knowledge and local ingenuity. We affirm our commitment peace with justice;
13. An end to nuclearisation at global, regional and local is urgent. We demand de-nuclearisation in our region and drastic reduction of defense expenditure. We call upon national governments to begin by reducing their defense expenditures annually at least by ten percent of the current allocation and reallocating the same for social security purposes. As a first step in this direction we demand the introduction of people's social security system to cover all segments of the economy— the unemployed and the marginalised people;
14. Among various forms of marginalization and exclusion we find the problems of refugees particularly of Bhutan, is alarming. Minimum standards must be followed immediately to arrest the continuing violation of Human Rights of the Bhutanese Refugees. Social and political security and the rights of refugees must be guaranteed without further delay. Similarly, the rights of all the people subjected to involuntary displacement, internally as well as externally, must be restored immediately; and

15. We express our serious concern in the renewed war in Sri Lanka and hardships of large sections of people in addition to the killing and wounding of countless numbers. We urge the parties in conflict to arrive at a speedy settlement and promote sustainable peace and reconciliation mechanism to prevent further conflict in the future.

We, the people of South Asia, unitedly in solidarity declare that we are not enemies of each other,

that we do not want war against each other, that we do not want to be armed into starvation. We further call upon all the governments of the different countries in the region to cease all covert and overt hostilities; to resolve all disputes through amicable dialogue, to immediately reduce tensions, to decrease the militarization of the borders and to take urgent steps to bring about peace, justice and ensure social security for the people to live in dignity.



South Asia News and Events

People's SAARC Assembly Alliance for Justice, Peace and Democracy

March 23rd to 25th at Kathmandu, Nepal

The emergence of the idea of People's SAARC was floated a decade ago. SAAPE and other like minded organisations debated and deliberated on this idea in several fora and elaborated on the nature, role and objectives of People's SAARC.

South Asia People's Assembly –

Vision and objectives of People's SAARC

i) Vision

People's Solidarity in South Asia legitimately cherish the vision and perspective of a alternative political, social, economic and cultural system in the region which will do away with all distinctions and discriminations of gender, caste, religion, language and ethnicity; will lead to a situation free from exploitation and oppression, will inaugurate a climate in which each individual will have the opportunity, in concern with the collectivity, to realise the full development of her or his human potential; will restore the balance and harmony with nature; will liquidate the artificial and inhuman barriers that divide lands, collectivities and minds and transcend all boundaries.

ii) Objectives

As a process, we feel that the people of South Asia should come together to face the challenge of combating marginalisation of the vulnerable groups, degradation of environment, communal divide and fragmentation through wider sharing of ideas and experiences and forging solidarity alliance across the borders. The pertinent issues that may constitute an action strategy are:

- Strengthening democracy, human rights and justice
- Promoting communal harmony and combating religious and ethnic violence;
- Environment: sustainable development and river water issues;

- Economic issues: resisting neo-liberal policies, possible alternatives;
- Peace: Demilitarisation and denuclearisation;
- Gender: Common charter of civil rights;
- Vision for future: Overall South Asian perspective for convergence

People's SAARC Alliance Process

The People's SAARC is a focal point and platform for sharing, forging and strengthening solidarity linkages along like-minded action groups, resources agencies, progressive individuals, among others, with the common aim of promoting a movement for democracy, justice, and build peoples resistance against the forces of globalisation across nations. This alliance should be based on people-to-people contacts rooted in a culture of friendship, ethical and moral values shared by the common people; partnership and common bond that transcend borders and sectoral and organisational concerns. This calls for an attitude to learn from each others struggles and strengthen the relationships and alliances already underway in our own societies. We are challenged to be open to other cultures and experiences in our efforts to link not just ideas but persons; to support and contribute rather than merely expect support; to give meaning to language and communication between peoples; and to be open to initiatives coming from all levels. To realise this goal, it's significant to hold a People's SAARC, in Kathmandu in early April 2007.

People's Assemble Concept and Programme

The last two decades of this century have witnessed an unprecedented neo-liberal growth model which is severely and even violently restructuring the region's economic policies and cultural life of the people. Inequality and exclusion, not merely a distortion of the system, is the logic

of the new paradigm and it is necessary for the growth and permanence of the system. The growing economic power of TNCs and MNCs and the role of international financial institutions, the unequal trade relations under the WTO regime have resulted in severe erosion of our national sovereignty, destruction of natural resources, agriculture and means of livelihood.

Such a sweeping economic programme is not without its political implications. The “free market” with its self-regulatory virtue being the heart of the neo-liberal ideology seeks to transform the nature of the state itself as that of market democracy in which the legitimacy of the government is subordinated to the sovereignty of the market. The state is thus made to surrender most of its functions to the market forces and is becoming increasingly a mechanism to maintain law and order by strengthening its repressive apparatuses. Secondly, it seeks to curtail and devalue democracy directly or indirectly. Besides, more and more decisions affecting the everyday life of the people are surrendered to the dictates of TNCs and global financial institutions to which there is no democratic access and no accountability. The citizens find themselves not only more and more politically alienated but the inversion of personal consciousness of being a citizen into an individualistic consumer without any social goals and ideals. Thirdly, the state as space for peaceful resolution of various forms of social conflict remains fragile as political institutions have been robbed of their relevance and there is the danger of the whole normative framework of democracy being undermined.

Ironically, while the state abdicates its social responsibility it equips itself with draconian powers of control, which aims to curtail people's movements and legitimate forms of organisation and protest.

Our system has constructed political, constitutional, administrative and developmental mechanisms in a manner which denies the masses any easy and rightful access to the instruments necessary or for realizing these rights. The parliamentary, democratic processes in one way provided space for legitimate social action but on the other hand the system exploits each and every situation of crisis to take away these democratic rights of the masses and to impose draconian laws and rules that in reality

spell a flagrant violation of the spirit if not the letter of its own Constitution and the commitment to uphold the principles of human rights. These laws empower the security forces to arrest citizens without warrant and to detain them without trial for long periods. Torture, custodial rape and extra-judicial killings have become common occurrences.

Priority areas, issues and concerns: a) Natural Resources b) Trade and Investments / Flow of Capital c) Gender d) Dalit e) Conflict and War on Terror

Representatives from various organizations such as trade unions, peasants associations, cultural groups, faith based organisations, Dalits, indigenous nationalities and disabled federations, women associations, natural resources users' groups, professional organizations, parliamentarians, media professionals, took part in the assembly organized by 'the People's SAARC'. A total of 21 parallel sessions and forums on social, political, economical, cultural issues in the South Asia were organized (such as food sovereignty, ecological agriculture and farmers' rights, disability, youths and politics, children's rights, women in politics, Dalit and social inclusion, natural resources management, refugees, migration and human trafficking, parliamentary forum, rights to education, janajati and indigenous issues). A campaign on “Imagine a New South Asia” was also launched in the opening program of the people's SAARC.

On 25th, the third day of the People's SAARC, thousands of people joined in the mass rally and culminated into a mass meeting. People's SAARC Kathmandu Declaration was read out in front of the thousands people as concluding remarks coming from the discussions of earlier two days. The political and civil society leaders of South Asian countries addressed the mass meeting and reiterated their commitments for democracy, justice and peace in the region.

People's SAARC Assembly

Collective affirmation and Demand for a New South Asia

1. We, the participants are unanimous that today's economic globalization is unequal, socially unjust and disruptive. It must be firmly resisted as it represents the triumph of corporate capitalism which

totally restructures the economic, social and cultural life of the people in the region. We resist the dominance of financial capital which imperils the world's monetary equilibrium. It transforms states into mafias. It proliferates hidden sources of capital accumulation such as trafficking, arms race and child slavery.

2. We shall unitedly work to develop and strengthen people based governance systems from grassroots to national and regional levels. We also affirm that organic and sustainable agriculture is an imperative for food security at the household, local and national levels based on the age-old practices and knowledge systems of our ancestors.
3. We also commit ourselves to conserve biodiversity, land, water and marine ecosystems and simultaneously resist the intellectual property rights imposed by the northern countries as a mechanism to take away the living resources of the people of the south. We also commit ourselves to reduce the hostilities and tension in the region which can release critical energies and scarce resources towards the betterment of the life conditions of the masses in the region.
4. We the people of South Asia unitedly in solidarity declare that we are not enemies of each other, that we do not want war against each other, that we do not want to be armed into starvation. We further call upon all the governments of the different countries in the region to cease all covert and overt hostilities, to resolve all disputes through amicable dialogue to immediately reduce tensions, to decrease the militarization of the borders and to take urgent steps to bring about total disarmament in the region.

We demand the following immediately;

1. Ensure (barrier) free mobility of people across the region by guaranteeing the notion of visa-free South Asia;
2. Strengthen and institutionalise democracy, human rights and justice and proportional participation of women at all

level of state and civil society institutions.;

3. Demilitarise and denuclearize the states and its machineries;
4. Promote communal harmony within and between communities, societies and states;
5. Combat religious, ethnic and gender based violence and outlaw all types of fundamentalism;
6. Address environmental sustainability as an urgent priority;
7. Protect biodiversity, water, forests, fisheries and other natural resources from which the majority of the people derive their livelihood; protect indigenous community wisdom;
8. Guarantee women's rights to be free from all kinds of discrimination and live a life without any forms of violence;
9. Guarantee sovereign rights of people for food;
10. Respect independence of all judiciary and judicial systems;
11. Solve the issues of refugees and IDPs; support just struggle of Bhutanese refugees;
12. Respect the right to information and promote free media;
13. Promote gender equality in all spheres - economic, social, political and cultural; Make provision for at least 50% reservation to women in all political, social and economic spheres of the society;
14. Make firm commitments regarding state obligations to provide health, education and basic needs; considering women's right to their body, sexuality and reproduction make special provision for women's access to health care from women's perspective;
15. Stop the free trade model, responsible for increasing poverty, trafficking of human beings, food insecurity and environmental destruction in the region;
16. Freeze defence budget and cut it at least by 10%. This amount should be diverted to social development. We realize that the huge spending on weapons by poor

- South Asian countries is one of the major causes of rampant poverty in the region. We also demand that India and Pakistan stop arms race and give up nuclear weapons which pose great threat to the 1.5 billion inhabitants of this peaceful region;
17. Globalisation has resulted in eroding labour rights; we demand SAARC states to ensure enforcement of Core Labour Rights at work places including Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and informal sector of work;
 18. Stop using state force against own citizens in the name of so called war on terror and stop operating as agents of America by allowing land to be used as military bases;
 19. Declare 2007-2017 as SAARC Dalits Rights Decade with enactment of concrete Acts, policies, programme and action plans;
 20. Formulate separate policies for Himalayan and mountainous regions because of regional specificity and ecological sensitivity of this region;
 21. Broaden the definition of violence against women (VAW) and provide justice to victims of all forms of violence. VAW is not only limited to physical or mental violence, but also all forms of discriminatory practices against women;
 22. Ban use of genetically modified seeds and organisms. Urgent action is needed to prevent the genetic contamination of the vast biodiversity of the SAARC region;
 23. Stop commercialisation of basic education; ensure right to education for all; treat equally to all students in terms of fee payment (e.g., applicable fees should not be charged in US\$ irrespective to the country of origin of the student in the SAARC region);
 24. Ensure rights of the children; include child rights in school curricula and declare children Zone of Peace;
 25. Promote religious co-existence, cooperation and harmony among and between the communities of the region;
 26. Recognize labour as one of the important resources of the region and provision of Labour Advisory Committee with the involvement of trade unions as a formal recognized body in SAARC;
 27. Respect and recognize the identity of South Asian Indigenous Peoples and ensure their social, political, economic and cultural rights in the constitution;
 28. Free the region from all forms of bonded labour system;
 29. Review present SAARC Convention on trafficking in women and children for prostitution and reformulate it from Human Rights perspective by broadening its definition on trafficking which can encompass trafficking for all purposes, and adding provisions which can protect rights of trafficked person to have access to justice, voluntary return home and fund for appropriate support and care;
 30. We urge our Governments to Protect Rights of Migrants workers and their families by signing UN CONVENTION ON MIGRANT WORKERS AND RIGHTS OF THEIR FAMILIES 1990; and
 31. Address the root causes of HIV/AIDS in a holistic way in the region.

The delegates also met in specific thematic workshops to discuss issues of vital concern to the people of the region. The resolutions, declarations, and demands of these thematic workshops that deal with specific sectors, areas, and concerns form the Annexure to this Declaration.

We conclude this Declaration, expressing our solidarity with the people of Nepal in their struggle for realising loktantra and further strengthen and defend the gains of pro-democracy movement. We also call upon all the democratic forces in the region to extend all possible support to strengthen democratic movement in Nepal.

We warn from the topmost range of the world 'the Himalayan Mountains' that the people of the region are sovereign and they are independent to decide the way they like.

International Conference on
Food Sovereignty, Agrarian Reforms and Peasants' Rights'
 29-31 August 2007
 Kathmandu declaration

Food Sovereignty as reliable frame work for Food and Agriculture Policies

We 310 peasants, agricultural workers, indigenous people, dalits, peasant women, NGOs, mass organizations from Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, Pakistan, Nepal, Philippines, Malaysia, Japan, Indonesia, Basque country, Norway, France, Mali and Brazil assembled on 29-31 August in Katmandu, Nepal, in the international conference on food sovereignty, agrarian reforms and peasants' rights organized jointly by La Via Campesina (an international peasants' movement) and Peasants' Coalition, Nepal, reaffirm and declare Food Sovereignty as the inalienable right of peoples, communities and countries. This right encompasses the right to define, decide and implement their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes right to land and productive resources ensuing right to food and to produce food which means that all people have right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food producing resources and technologies and ability to sustain themselves, their resources and societies.

On this occasion, we like to extend our thanks to all our international friends for their warm support and solidarity and congratulate the Nepali peasants for their victory on incorporating Food Sovereignty as a fundamental right in the interim constitution of the country. We thank the Nepalese government and the political forces for accepting Food Sovereignty as people's fundamental right. We pledge our solidarity and support for the struggle of peasants to uphold their rights and call the Nepali government and State to institutionalize Food Sovereignty in Nepali Constitution.

During this three-day long international conference, we engaged in deep and strategic discussions, debates, and shared our views and experiences to analyze the local, national,

regional and international situation of peasants, landless farmers, Dalits, indigenous people and women and concluded that we are experiencing the loss of control of our food production; our local foods can not compete with the imported food produced by big corporations; much of agricultural land is under the control of the landlords; and our natural resources including water and forest is being exploited by a handful of powerful interests worldwide in general and Nepal in particular. By and large, the trend forces our peasants to losing control over local seeds and biodiversity under present pro-liberal policy encroachments. The wisdom and local knowledge of thousands is being ignored and damned to widen profits through corporate agriculture.

This is the result of neo-liberal policies and global capitalism promoting corporate globalization driven by G8 countries in collusion with national elites institutionalized by WTO and other regional and bilateral agreements and promoted by the International Financial Institutions such as World Bank and IMF. The globalization process has only benefited the Transnational Corporations, their lackeys and national elites and landlords. As a consequence, poverty, hunger and malnutrition is increasing, it is causing loss of peasant livelihoods, displacement and forced migration and increasing violations of human rights. Such disempowering conditions are not only a reality in Nepal but also in many countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe.

We call for:

- the implementation of Food Sovereignty, Agrarian Reform, and Peasant's Rights in Nepal and support the peasant movements in Nepal in their just struggle to achieve these demands.
- we will fight against all forms of neo liberal policies and global capitalism and neo-imperialism, being imposed by WTO, WB, IMF, and other forms of IFI's

- the end to absolute Kingship in Nepal that exploited, toiled and moiled Nepalese peasants inflicting untold miseries for centuries together under the yoke of feudalism and congratulate Nepalese people in their just struggle to achieve democracy and wish a grand success on establishing democratic republic through forth coming election to constituent assembly. We also like to make heart felt appeal to all democratic republican forces to rally around and forge strong unity to get absolute majority in constituent assembly through the forth coming election because their is no emancipation of peasants' without establishing a Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.

Towards the goal of Food Sovereignty and Peasants' Rights we demand an International Convention on Food Sovereignty and Peasant Rights which will enshrine the principles of Food Sovereignty in international law and institute food sovereignty as the principal policy framework for addressing food and agriculture. We strongly call upon all national governments across the world to undertake immediate steps to:

- Implement genuine agrarian reforms ensuring land to tillers and landless peasants and ensure women's rights over land
- Get WTO out of Agriculture
- Pursue the Convention on Biodiversity with active participation of peasants
- No privatization of common productive resources land and water, social services and life forms
- Ensure women's equal participation and rights in all respects of socio-economic life including proportional representation
- No patents rights on life forms
- No to Genetic Engineering in agriculture
- Support and promote sustainable ecological agriculture without the use of harmful pesticides
- Ensure implementation of fair prices to farmers and fair share in the price
- Ensure farmers Sovereign right over seeds

- Declare guaranteed employment with minimum and equal wages without gender discrimination
- Establish peasants commission headed by peasants associations and representatives
- We strongly call on government of Nepal and India to review the unilateral construction of dams in bordering Indian side that has obstructed Nepali Peasants' livelihood in near by bordering areas providing them required compensations and make natural flow of water intact.
- Initiate and enact food sovereignty law to protect the right of the people
- Protect the civil right of migrant workers and especially migrant women workers who are forcefully turned to sex workers.
- Declare martyrs all those killed by the government and guarantee Food Sovereignty to martyr families.
- Protect and promote indigenou knowledge of farming
- Ensure representation of peasants and peasants' associations in legislative bodies
- Ensure genuine peasants participation in any decision affecting farming communities and in food and agriculture policies and programmes
- Respect the sovereign right of Bhutanese People to return to their land and call upon all concerned to make easier arrangement for this purpose.
- We also demand enactment and effective enforcement of Peasants' law through peasant courts wherever necessary.

In this context we also commit ourselves to:

- Promote local resource based, regenerative, sustainable models in agriculture
- Research, document, and share experiences in sustainable ecological agriculture across the region
- Establish research centers to work on sustainable ecological agriculture

- Study and document the adverse effects of neo liberal economies
- Take up regional and national campaigns against IFIs
- Support farmers to actively reject GM crops and chemicals in agriculture
- Strengthen the existing regional networks working for peasants rights
- Conduct public hearings on atrocities of TNCs
- Organize and support local struggles of farmers and agriculture workers
- Take up advocacy on right to food and food sovereignty
- Launch campaigns for food sovereignty, genuine agrarian reforms and peasants rights
- Conduct series of workshops/trainings on food sovereignty
- Initiate and promote cooperative movement as an alternative system for the socio-economic and cultural upliftment of small farmers, marginalized and landless peasants' and commercialize the agri-products and small farmers business.
- Immediately establish national peasants' forum and create conducive environment for its successful operation.

We shall work together in solidarity with other peasants' forum and social movements to achieve these demands and help promote food sovereignty, genuine agrarian reforms and peasants' rights.

31 August 2007



Peace and Demilitarization Workshop, Kathmandu

National Alliance for Human Rights and Social Justice, Nepal (Human Rights Alliance) regional thematic focal organization on peace justice and demilitarization organized a workshop in 23rd March, 2007 on peace, justice and demilitarization in South Asia to share the past, present situation of peace and militarism. From the side of Nepal was sharing the various events, agreements that how Nepal was entered in the peace process after a long decade armed conflict.

This workshop was an event of the learning and sharing process among the south Asian countries on the theme of peace, Justice and demilitarization. The main purpose of this program was to educate about the present scenario of peace and demilitarization focusing the experience of Nepalese context and this program contributed to develop regional mechanism in favor of peace and against the arms production all over the south Asia. In that workshop, India, Pakistan, Srilanka, Nepal and Bangladesh presented papers.

In this program, Ms. Zakia Zohar from India welcomed to all participants. She addressed that it is need to make common policy including the

people's agendas and influence to media with people's action plan in her welcome speech. In this program, Mr. Tariq Ali from Bangladesh presented his paper on peace, Justice and demilitarization and Mr. Sarif A. Kafi from B'desh also presented the paper on the context of B'desh. Then, Prof. Kamal Mitra Chenoy from India presented the paper on the context of India focusing the people's SAARC. In that workshop, Ms. Naish Hasim from Kasmir presented her remarks and she focused on the Kasmir conflict situation and it was beginning from 1989 and it influenced from the Indian and Pakistan militarization policy and in her speech she put the people's agendas on free access of the world for the economic benefits.

Likewise, Mr. Zulfiqar Shah from Pakistan presented his remarks and he focused that need to the international civil society and political campaign to eradicate the poverty and free visa. Then Mr. Nizam Karriapper from Srilanka focused the Srilankan conflict situation and he addressed Tamil and Sihala's activities. Then, Dr. Mathura Shrestha from Nepal presented the paper. He focused in his presentation Nepalese peace process and political polarization of Nepal. He further addressed that the 12 years armed

conflict and 19 days historical people's movement of Nepal and highlighted the issues of constitutional assembly election and republic agenda in the context of Nepal.

In the workshop, the cultural and civil aviation honorable minister, Mr. Pradeep Gwayali who was the one major member of dialogue committee from the government of Nepal with Maoist remarked in the program. He shared the need of dialogue with Maoist and its practiced and experience about peace process, 12 points declarations, 5 points agreements and comprehensive peace accord between the Maoist and Government of Nepal. Likewise, Mr. Kapil Shrestha discussed about the 10 years civil war and militarization of Nepal and further put the agenda to reduce the government's budget in the militarization and weapons. The program was chaired by Mr. Gauri Pradhan, chairperson of Human Rights Alliance and moderated by Ms. Shanti Adhikary, General Secretary of Human Rights Alliance.

Human Rights Alliance on behalf of regional coordinator on peace, justice and demilitarization demonstrated more than 200 play card related the content of peace, justice and demilitarization and free visa in South Asia. In the closing mass meeting Ms. Shanti Adhikary from Human Rights Alliance moderated the program.

Major Outcomes

The major outcomes of this workshop are as follows.

- South Asia has to be maintaining independent foreign policy.
- South Asia nuclear free zone
- South Asian disarmament initiatives on landmines, small arms and conventional weapons.
- Alliances for creating multi polar world rather than maintaining uni-polar vision and supporting US hegemony.
- Strengthening the international law rather than letting a situation of anarchy.
- Free Visa in South Asia
- Human Rights Education should be included in the schools textbook.
- The budget should be reduced in the militarization.

Recommendations

The followings are the recommendations issues for the implementing organizations

- Human Rights Education should be included in the schools textbook.
- The budget should be reduced in the militarization
- Resolution of bilateral issues like Kasmir, India China boarder issues by negotiations and inclusion of local people and people's groups who are the real holders of sovereignty.
- Strengthening regional organizations like people's SAARC
- Security of people not just security of territory
- Security of individuals not just security of nations
- Security of everywhere in homes, streets and community.

Media Strategic Workshop held in Kathmandu

Human Rights Alliance organized a workshop on media strategy on peace, justice and demilitarization theme on the occasion of SAAPE AGM on 31 July in Kathmandu. In this workshop, the India, B'desh, Bhutan, Pakistan, Afganstan, Srilanka and Nepal participated. The workshop was chaired by Ms. Shanti Adikary, Chairperson of HR alliance and facilitated by Ajit from VAK, India. Likewise, Mr. Gauri Pradhan, past president of HR alliance presented a paper. This workshop identified the following 10 major strategies.

- To provide a regional multi sector, multi agency strategic partnership structure to deliver the requirements of the enabling role.
- To facilitate and promote the effective contact, coordination and partnership with media
- To facilitate regional strategic coordination and dialogues
- To gather regional date and trends and monitor and evaluate the impact of civil society and human rights movement on peace justice and demilitarization

- To promote community safety and cohesion through a multi agency approach.
- To identify and seek to address gaps in resource service provision and delivery to the victims of war and human rights violation.
- To expose the increasing militarization and defense budget in South Asia by providing reliable information and fact sheets
- To coordinate and develop strategic partnership with media organization
- To provide necessary training, interaction and exposure programs to media people to get the insights of human rights, violence, war, and militarization in the region.



Report: Democracy and Governance

Kathmandu on 31 July 07

Thematic focal point on Democracy and Governance held its regional meeting at Kathmandu during the Annual General Meeting of SAAPE on July 31st 2007 was attended by the representatives of several organizations from across South Asia.

The meeting started with a presentation of the draft approach note by Sandeep Pendse with a brief background and purpose of the study on the state of Democracy and Governance in South Asia. He stressed on the imperatives of a full and functioning democracy as a precondition where people can take informed and deliberative decisions without coercion, fear, or prejudice about the utilisation of natural and human created resources—from the local to the national and in the region—in the foreseeable future. People's control over natural resources and the fruits of their own labour is a prerequisite for the eradication of poverty. Therefore, the democratisation process is fundamental to human existence.

Following the presentation the participants from different countries of South Asia shared their concerns about the state of democracy and governance in their respective countries and its implications on the region.

Dr Samad explained the current situation obtaining in Bangladesh and the democratic imbroglio persisting in the country. The non-elected, caretaker government in power for the last ten months is on the offensive against all forms of democratic processes as exemplified with the recent dissolution of the elected bar council. Bangladesh's new authoritarian rulers

are destroying what's left in the country's democratic institutions with the support of the army which has notorious records of being in power without taking any meaningful step in combating poverty, especially, in a nation where the majority of the citizens find it hard making their ends meet. On the other hands the masses are also disillusioned with the major political parties and its leadership which have failed to strengthen democracy and democratic forces in Bangladesh. In this context, it is pertinent to have new forms of struggles for democracy that is inclusive and empowers the masses. Such meaningful steps can ensure a sustainable democratic process with the participation of vigilant, active and informed people consciously shaping their own destiny.

Dr. Sunil Wijesiriwardhane of Sri Lanka emphasized the need for a redefinition of political power to strengthen democratic process that is participatory and inclusive. He also talked about the historical evolution of the political system and the dangers posed by the neo-liberal approach to decision making. The "market-fundamentalism" and its impacts on the democratic process is a concern and the challenge to combat it should be taken up by citizens. He stressed the importance of public sphere and the media's role in creating it.

Mohamed Zohair of Maldives underlined the participatory concept and the lack of it. He said that in Maldives "democracy" is owned by a few elites, centred on the capital Male and the need to change it. He also stressed on the linkages between social capital and democratic processes.

Farooq Tariq of Pakistan narrated the struggles for democracy in Pakistan and the limited victories achieved by the pro-democracy forces against the stratocratic state apparatus. These valuable experiences also guide us to challenge the notions of formally existing democracy and its constituencies.

The issues of refugees and the denial of any rights to the linguistic minorities in Bhutan was a serious problem in the democratization process of the region and Mohan Tamang from Bhutan felt that democratic process in the region is undermined by such blatant exclusion in one part of the region.

Prajeena Karmacharya of Nepal spoke about the urban-rural divide of democracy and therefore the urgent necessity of redefining democracy beyond formal mechanism.

Dr. Netra Timsina of Nepal highlighted the valuable experiences learnt through the struggle for democracy in this Himalayan state.

The meeting ended with a decision to formally engage in the examination of democracy in the Region through several country and regional

processes and to come out with a democratic audit of the region. Hence, it will not only study the existing state of democracy but also redefine democracy in order to deepen its meaning, content and people's participation. It would also in this process formulate a South Asia People's Charter for Democracy that would seek to contribute to the people's struggles for democracy in the region.

While engaged in the process it will take stock of the objective situation of the democratisation process in the countries of the region, the impediments to democracy and democratisation, as well as the people's constant endeavour to achieve democracy.

The Thematic Focal Point on Democracy and Governance decided to initiate a South Asia campaign against foreign debt and for defending sovereignty, democracy and governance. The planned activities include: Regional Workshop for principle activists of campaign; debt Audit in different countries; Compilation and Publicisation of debt audit; Preparation of awareness and publicity material; Week of Campaign Action.



South Asia Conference

Social Movements and International Financial Institutions' Policies

Vagamon, Kerala, India on March 14-15, 2007

Comments by Eric Toussaint

[An important meeting was organized by Thematic Focal Point on Democracy and Governance, Mumbai and CADTM, Belgium to bring together social activists who are actively involved in various struggles across the India and in South Asia and help them situate their struggles in the broader international context, especially the policies of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and other international actors such as WTO, the Paris Club, TNCs, and the G-8 countries.]

The meeting began with the deliberations of Eric Toussaint of CADTM. He posited that vast impoverishment had happened across the world over the past 30 years due to wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, structural adjustment programs in the 1980's and 1990's, wage reduction, neoliberal attacks on peasants and fisherpeople as well as international debt. Having explained the world backdrop from the 1950's to the 1970's, Eric pointed out how WB and IMF became

instruments to organize the world capital. Although these institutions are part of the UN system, they do not have the 'one country one vote' system. The United States and the United Kingdom have 48% of the votes, and India has 3-4% of the votes. Five to nine industrialized countries dominate these institutions.

The so-called "Backward Countries" were called 'Third World' countries during the 1950's and the WB lent money to these countries at high interest rates. India supported the SUNFED program in the 1950's. The International Development Agency (IDA) was created within the WB and India was made a major client by lending money for major projects.

The WB, private banks of North countries, and the governments of countries such as the US,

UK and France all give out loans. In 1979, the US government modified interest rates five-fold and the debtor nations were badly affected. In the 1960's the WB supported cash crops. In the 1970's industrialized countries went into recession. The debt of the Third World countries rose and that resulted in the reduction of prices of cash crops. The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) obliged the Third World countries to adjust their economies to Northern economic interests and these poor countries had to borrow more money to pay back old loans.

The total Third World debt that stood at \$60 billion in the beginning of 1968 has now skyrocketed to \$2.8 trillion. The Third World countries pay \$300 billion annually to creditors. The enormity and gravity of this burden can be understood when we realize that it costs only \$50 billion to provide 50 litres of drinkable water to all Third World people for a whole year.

India has \$145 billion of foreign exchange and is buying US treasury bonds and getting 4% interest. But it borrows more money at 8 to 13 percent interest rate. China invests in Africa and lends money to African countries in order to buy iron ore and other things from them. China simply tries to replace the US.

Sub-Saharan countries in Africa are deeply immersed in debt. Rwanda's 90% external debt is to WB and IMF. In 1998 G8 and IMF said they would write off 100% of the loans but no country received 100% debt cancellation. Lots of grants are given to buy US technology to countries like Congo. The US is interested in copper, uranium and colton and the US companies try to control resources by lending money.

WB and other IFIs such as IDA, IBRC, IFC lend to private entrepreneurs and enterprises. Argentina tried to cancel its external debt but the elites of that country opposed the move because of decrease in their control over the national economy. The US took aggressive stand against Argentina when that country decided not to pay private lenders and bilateral creditors such as the Paris Club.

Venezuela and Cuba carried out a unique experiment in which 20,000 Cuban doctors went to Venezuela in exchange for imported goods from the latter. 40,000 Venezuelans received free cataract surgery.

During the 1973 oil shock, commodity price and oil price were high and in 1979 the US thought higher interest rate was the answer. If we do not overthrow the system today, what happened in the late 1970's may happen again.

The internal domestic public debt is 80% in India and the capitalistic class in India lends also. The Indian public could get into big problems.

During the 1970's and 1980's offensive of capitalist class didn't have much social resistance. We can discern two dominant tendencies: 1) offensive against enemies and 2) capacity to build solidarity networks and movements against WTO, IMF and debt.

What is the way out? Experiments in countries such as Venezuela and Cuba could be alternative models to imperialism. Chavez implements reforms such as eradication of illiteracy in 3 years with free education with food and books etc. His indigenous model of development insisted on price control, produced seeds, fertilizers and pesticides in the country, eliminated VAT and taxes on basic food and services, and nationalized power and telecom. Since the capitalist class controls 90% of the media, Chavez encouraged community radio and TV.

Most governments do not need to take loans if they follow good fiscal policies and recover the rich people's money from Swiss and other banks. Although commodified economy is the order of the day, subsistence economy is still important. If national resources are not allowed to be exploited by cities and industrialists etc., capital formation can happen. Big cities are thriving in the present scheme. How marginal communities are going to survive is a big question. Joint mutual funds can be created. Chavez is not producing export-oriented model of economy but it does not solve all problems. Cuba plans to produce power by small generators instead of big power plants and to remove the transmission loss.

How long can this extractive economy be sustained? A new development paradigm is needed that is not linked to growth. Development also means regress because we are damaging natural resources. As India and China adopt Western development model, the world is going to be destroyed soon.

What is the alternative? Integrated ecological discourse that emphasizes 'use value' rather

than 'exchange value' that has become so monetized and so profit-oriented.

Reduce the volume of export and cash crops. Retain your natural resources and reorganize agriculture. Providing food and sovereignty of the world countries, we must restrict cartels of banana producers and tea producers. Reduce competition among Third World countries. For instance, Kenya will specialize in producing tea and India on rice etc. Venezuela will help refine the gas of Bolivia and Bolivia can barter soy with Venezuela and so forth.

[Back in March 2006, the IMF Managing Director, Rodrigo de Rato, addressed a meeting in Zambia of finance ministers from seven African countries that had qualified for debt relief, said the critical challenge these countries faced was not to

replace debt very quickly. He said: "Debt goes very slowly, but comes very quickly, that's an experience we should keep in mind here in Sub-Saharan Africa. It can happen, we have seen this before, so the important challenge is not to go back to debt." Nineteen of the world's poorest nations were to receive 100 percent write-off of foreign debt from the G-8 through the IMF, the World Bank and the Africa Development Bank under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI). Of these thirteen were in Africa. African states were asked to make transparent and efficient use of the donor aid and to allow scaled up aid flows reach their targets in education, health and fighting HIV/AIDS.]

As reported in Khaleej Times,
18 March 2007



Activities in Genetic Engineering Workshop

All Nepal Peasants' Federation and South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication jointly organized South Asia Regional workshop on Genetic Engineering from 31st July to 1st August, 2007 in Kathmandu. Workshop mainly focused on the Genetic Engineering in Agriculture and its unwanted socio-economic impacts on farming. The workshop welcomed around 50 participants from the South Asia Region.

The discussion focused mainly under two broad headings. The first part dealt on introduction and overview on Genetic Engineering, its current status, worldwide situation in relation to IPRs and at the South Asia Level. Under this heading, various experts gave presentation on 1. Genetic Engineering-The Science and Technology, Intellectual Property Right and Genetic Engineering 2. World wide Impact of Genetic Engineering in Agriculture 3. Genetic Engineering in Nepal: Status of Research and Development and Commercial Approvals: National Regulatory Regime. After each presentation the floor was open for the discussion where the participants discussed freely with genuine enthusiasm and help convince that the Genetic Engineering has negative impact on the socio economic status of the poor farmers.

The second aspect was analysis of countrywide situation of South Asia regarding Genetic Engineering. Under this heading, participants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal presented the situation analysis of GE in Each country. Towards the end of the session, Members of the South Asia Alliance gathered to frame strategy to combat Genetic Engineering in Agriculture and to promote nature-friendly agricultural technology that has been used by the farmers from the time immemorial. A common strategy was formulated which includes following main points:

- Campaigning on issues like agrarian reform, which covers all the issues like genetic engineering, cooperative, WTO out of agriculture, genuine land reforms, no privatization of common productive resources land and water, no patents on life forms, gender equality and women in agriculture, market reforms, Regenerative and Sustainable agriculture, etc
- Organizing more workshop of similar type in different countries to share the experiences in these related issues
- Farmers exchange and exposure visit to know the situation of each SAARC country

- Share knowledge about the agricultural technology used by farmers
- Start dialect with the governmental officials to get feedback, convince and interlink with them
- Alliance building between the farmers' forums, NGOs and other organization fighting for farmers' right
- Organizing awareness building campaigns against GE in agriculture as it is a technical issue, having impact on peoples' livelihood
- Lobbying against GE in agriculture
- Training and capacity building on issues related to Food Sovereignty
- Research on impact of GE and neo-liberal policies
- Promoting main agricultural technology used by farmers
- Intervening in official SAARC in the related issues
- Creating agricultural database
- Organizing talk programmes with the political person, motivating them and lobbying with the political leaders from the part of farmers so that Food Sovereignty can be assured
- Focusing on studying SAFTA



Rising income inequality in Asia

The key findings of a recent study by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) relating to income inequalities across Asia ought to find a ready resonance in India where the economic and political discourses of the day are focussed on themes such as inclusive growth and growth with equity. In saying that in Asia the rich are growing richer faster than the poor, the ADB has reinforced the widely held view that in India the fruits of rapid economic growth are not reaching the poor in a substantial measure is true of the rest of the continent as well. Relative inequality deals with proportionate differences in incomes and, as measured by the Gini coefficient, it has been rising in most of the 22 Asian countries covered by the study but significantly in China, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka between mid-1990s and 2005. A higher Gini coefficient indicates higher inequality. The ADB has found that absolute inequality – the actual difference in incomes reckoned in dollars – has also been increasing everywhere. That, in the context of the rapid economic growth these countries have been witnessing, has had one major consequence. The better off sections have experienced considerably large increases in their standards of living than the least well-off. The expenditures of the rich forming part of the top

quintile have increased much more than those at the bottom quintile. That the poor are not getting poorer is some consolation, though. However, the inference is obvious that there is a fundamental flaw in the patterns of economic growth in most of these countries and it needs to be addressed.

The widening rich-poor divide suggests that the emerging economies like India – unlike Japan, South Korea and a few other countries that managed to achieve growth with equity early on – will have to remould their strategies to make inclusive growth a reality. The consequences of rising inequalities can be dire. The ADB report, citing Nepal which has one of the highest levels of income disparity, says that it can lead to political unrest. India's Gini coefficient rose from 32.9 in 1993 to 36.3 in 2004. Although India does not figure at the top of the countries with high income inequalities, it ranks poorly on the basis of benchmarks in other areas such as land and health. The ADB report's value is enhanced because of its inter-country comparisons. In particular, it makes out a strong case for increased public investment in the social and in infrastructure-supporting economic activities that benefit the poor.

The Hindu



SAARC nations to finalise anti-terror pact

Experts of eight South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member nations will meet in Colombo to examine an India-prepared draft for a regional anti-terrorism pact.

Home and interior ministers of the member nations – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives – are scheduled to meet in New Delhi on October 26 to sign the pact that would be finalised a day earlier by the home and interior secretaries.

SAARC member nations lack bilateral mechanism for cooperation in this area and a regional pact is seen as a first and a necessity since a significant part of the global phenomenon emanates from this region.

The regional anti-terrorism agreement will provide them with a legal basis for devising a common strategy to tackle the global scourge, New Age newspaper said on Sunday.

The agenda for the experts' meeting in Colombo for three days will be regional security concerns and transnational crimes, it said. The meeting

of the legal advisers, the expert body, will weigh the pros and cons of the draft and is likely to finalise it in the Colombo meeting.

The draft prepared by India suggests cooperation in uprooting the root causes of crimes by making detained persons available to assist investigations, taking measures to locate, restrain or seize the proceeds and instruments of crime, and taking necessary measures to locate, freeze and confiscate any funds meant for the financing acts of terrorism in the territory of SAARC nations.

It also suggested mutual assistance for locating and identifying persons and objects associated with terrorism, providing information, searching and seizing terrorists and arms. The draft notes that since the SAARC member-states do not have bilateral agreements on mutual assistance in criminal matters it would be significant and very important for the SAARC countries to negotiate a convention on mutual assistance in criminal matters.

Asian Age, 10 September 2007



As floods swirl, UN report says this year is seeing record extreme weather

The world experienced a series of record-breaking weather events in early 2007, from flooding in Asia to heat waves in Europe and snowfall in South Africa, the United Nations weather agency said on Tuesday.

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) said global land surface temperatures in January and April were likely the warmest since records began in 1880, at more than 1 degree Celsius higher than average for those months. There have also been severe monsoon floods across South Asia, abnormally heavy rains in northern Europe, China, Sudan, Mozambique and Uruguay, extreme heat waves in southeastern Europe and Russia, and unusual snowfall in South Africa and South America this year, the WMO said. While most scientists believe extreme weather events will be more frequent as heat-

trapping carbon dioxide emissions cause global temperatures to rise, Baddour said it was impossible to say with certainty what the second half of 2007 will bring.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a UN umbrella group of hundreds of experts, has noted an increasing trend in extreme weather events over the past 50 years and said irregular patterns are likely to intensify. South Asia's worst monsoon flooding in recent memory has affected 30 million people in India, Bangladesh and Nepal, destroying croplands, livestock and property and raising fears of a health crisis in the densely populated region.

Heavy rains also doused southern China in June, with nearly 14 million people affected by floods and landslides that killed 120 people, the WMO said.

England and Wales this year had their wettest May and June since records began in 1766, resulting in extensive flooding and more than \$6 billion in damage, as well as at least nine deaths.

Germany swung from its driest April since countrywide observations started in 1901 to its wettest May on record.

Indian Express, 9 August 2007



Disease, mosquitoes post-flood in South Asia

Relief Agencies, struggling to provide aid to millions left homeless after South Asia's worst floods in living memory, are battling mosquitoes and water-borne diseases including diarrhoea.

More than 2,000 people have died in India, Bangladesh and Nepal after monsoon rains and melting Himalayan snow caused rivers to burst their banks. About 30 million people have lost their homes or livelihoods, according to the United Nations Children's Fund, or UNICEF.

"The numbers are only the tip of the iceberg," said P. Unnikrishnan, a Bangalore-based humanitarian coordinator for Action Aid International. "Sanitation is an issue now as there's no clean water, while aid has yet to reach the weakest and the poorest who are in inaccessible areas.

"The death toll may rise as a few villages reported fatalities from diarrhoea in the northern Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, he said. "An outbreak is a serious possibility."

"The UN's World Food Programme warned of a food crisis across northern India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Monsoon rains between June and September are essential for agriculture in South Asia and cause annual flooding. This year's monsoon rains have been of a "startling magnitude and intensity," Unicef said on August 7.

"After the floodwaters subside, millions of poor families will remain devastated from the loss of their crops, livestock and in some cases, family

members," Josette Sheeran, executive director of the UN's World Food Programme, said in an email.

In India, the floods have killed 1,550 people, destroyed 743,008 homes and damaged about 5.3 million hectares (13.1 million acres) of farmland, causing losses of more than \$266 million, as of August 9, according to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has ordered the rapid release of funds to provide relief to people hit by the floods, Information Minister Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi told reporters after a cabinet meeting that reviewed the situation. The federal government has provided \$318 million in aid, he said.

The European Commission, the executive arm of the European Union, said it was pledging an aid package of \$5.5 million.

"This region needs all the money donors can pool in," said Unnikrishnan. "Floods are amplifying the problems of chronic malnutrition and acute poverty in this region, where we are talking about a huge number of people."

"Medical workers in neighboring Bangladesh battle outbreaks of diarrhoea and cholera," Agence France-Presse reported.

About 7,600 of more than 8,600 primary schools are closed in the South Asian country, and 23,000 cases of diarrhoea have been reported, the news agency cited Unicef as saying.

The Hindu, 12 August 2007



South Asia Features

INDIA

75% of Indians are poor and vulnerable

The number of people below the poverty line may have come down, but 79% of unorganised workers, 88% of SC/STs, 80% of the OBC population and 84% of Muslims belong to the “poor and vulnerable group”. That’s the grim warning in the report of the Commission on the condition of unorganised sector workers.

Despite high economic growth in recent years, the report notes, “They have remained poor at a bare subsistence level without any social security, working in the most miserable, unhygienic and unlivable conditions”.

The category “poor and vulnerable” is one used by the Commission to describe all those who survive on less than Rs. 20.30 per capita per day, which is twice the poverty line, or less. The report notes that 77% of India’s population falls within this bracket.

That includes 6.4% who live on less than Rs. 9 per day or three-fourths the poverty line level, another 15.4% who are between this layer and the poverty line, 19% who earn at best 1.25 times the poverty line and 36% who earn between 1.25 and two times the official cut-off for poverty. It, therefore, cautions that while large numbers may have technically ceased to be included in the official poor, they remain vulnerable.

Analysing various factors which have a bearing on the working and living conditions in the informal sector, the National Commission for

Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, headed by economist Arjun Sengupta, found a close correlation with illiteracy.

The NCEUS, that formally announced its findings on Thursday, noted that “The illiterate have a very high probability of being poor or vulnerable, almost nine out of ten, and they are predominantly unorganised workers. Even those with education up to only primary level, 83% are in the poor and vulnerable group.”

Analysing the relationship between poverty and vulnerability and the type of employment among unorganised workers, the report observed that 90% of the poor were casual workers while only 10% of the higher income group were casual workers. Among regular wage workers, 66.7% were in the poor and vulnerable groups, while 33% were from higher income group. Among the self-employed, 74.7% were from the poor and vulnerable and 25.3% came from the higher income group.

The report highlighted that 79% of unorganised casual non-agricultural women workers in the villages are illiterate. Poverty among casual non-agri workers in cities is higher by almost 60% compared to villages. Also, 87% of women in the non-agricultural unorganised sectors work for less than the stipulated minimum wages and 85% of women agricultural labourers are illiterate.

The Times of India, 11 August 2007



83.6 crore Indians live on Rs. 20 per day

Yet they are not considered as below poverty line people because one has to earn less than Rs. 12 a day to fall into that category

What can Rs. 20 possibly fetch? Two bottles of soft drinks, a short ride on a three-wheeler maybe, but not even a packet of cigarettes.

Right? Not entirely. For 83.6 crore Indians, Rs. 20 per day, or Rs. 600 per month, buys them their daily subsistence. In that Rs. 600 per month, buys them their daily subsistence. In that Rs. 600 per month, they eat, travel, pay rent and live their lives.

Technically, a large chunk of these 83.6 crore Indians – 77 per cent of India’s population – are above the poverty line at Rs. 12 per day. But they continue to be dismally poor. Nearly 85 per cent of them comprise scheduled castes and tribes, OBCs and Muslims. But that is not only disturbing figure revealed in the ‘Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihood in the Unorganised Sector’, compiled by the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS), a government-affiliated body. A staggering 39.49 crore workers – 86 per cent of India’s working population – work in the unorganised sector, which means they work in private establishments with less than 10 employees, without a social security cover. Nearly 80 per cent of these workers are among those who live on less than Rs. 20 per day.

“These are the discriminated, the disadvantaged and the downtrodden. People who live on Rs. 20 or less per day are the real poor and vulnerable,” NCEUS chairman Dr. Arjun Sengupta said while releasing the report, the first authoritative study on the state of informal or unorganised employment in the country. The report, which sourced data from the National Sample Survey Organisation, covers the period between 1993–94 and 2004–2005.

Speaking to HT, Sengupta said that Rs. 20, which signifies consumption pattern, is an indicator of the person’s income and saving. “If people do not earn, how will they spend or save? Higher income groups will also spend more,” he said. On the World Bank’s statement that per capita income in India is now \$1000, Sengupta said that is because of a sharp increase in income in the middle and higher income groups.

Employment in the agriculture sector, the report found, is also a fertile ground for poverty, especially for small and marginal farmers. It found that 84 per cent of small and marginal farmers spend more than they earn, and then are caught in the debt trap. Nearly 84 per cent of all farmer households are forced to spend Rs. 2770 per month while earning Rs. 2115.

Sengupta said: “Unorganised workers in agriculture and non-agriculture together contribute to about 58 per cent of national income, of which 25 per cent comes from agriculture.” Ironically, these are the workers the country as well as successive governments seems to have conveniently forgotten.

Hindustan Times, 10 August 2007



ILO Report on India’s Caste based discrimination

Caste-based discrimination maybe abolished by law in India but it remains a major cause why backward classes, especially the Dalits, remain confined to menial tasks like manual scavenging and removal of dead animals, according to a latest report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on discrimination in the job sector. Affirmative action has been able to assist only a small number of Dalits in finding formal jobs but has failed to provide even and equal opportunities to all, the report added.

“Violence, discrimination and segregation are a daily experience for millions of men and women in several regions of the world. But the practice (of discrimination that is rooted in caste or similar systems) is most widespread in South Asia, particularly in India and Nepal,” the report, titled

‘Equality at Work: Tackling the Challenges’ remarked.

The report, a follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, was released in New Delhi by the Union Labour and Employment Minister, Oscar Fernandes, on Thursday.

The report added that Dalits are generally not accepted for any work involving contact for water and food for non-Dalits or entering a non-Dalit residence. “Thus, they are excluded from a wide-range of work opportunities in the area of production, processing or sale of food items, domestic work and the provision of certain services in the private and public sectors,” the report said, adding their situation is further

impaired by limited access to education, training and resources.

The report advised authorities not to merely adopt a “purely development approach to improve the lot of Dalits”. It suggested that underlying structural causes and caste barriers need to be addressed simultaneously.

The ILO is also looking closely at the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP). “It is premature to draw any conclusions about the impact of the scheme on

poverty and gender equality, but concerns have been voiced about possible tensions within families over the selection of the member to be given the job and about women being left out,” it said.

The ILO is conducting surveys in select districts to examine the decent work and gender equality aspects of NREGP. “The ultimate goal is to devise the necessary safeguards to be put in place in the NREGP so that men and women can benefit from it equally,” the report said.



‘Don’t let new mining policy hurt the tribals’

Tribal activists are demanding the Centre should ensure that the mining activities in mineral-rich states involve least damage to tribal lives, including displacement and loss of rights on their lands. This assumes significance, as speculation is rife that the New Mining Policy will be tabled in the ensuing Monsoon Session of Parliament, beginning from August 10. It is feared that it could lead to greater exploitation of fresh mineral reserves and increase foreign direct investment (FDI) in the sector.

Since early 90s, as part of the new wave of liberalisation, thousands of mining leases have been issued, giving away Adivasis’ lands to domestic and global private mining corporations. This, despite a number of constitutional safeguards, meant to protect the interests of these vulnerable communities and their fragile but resource-rich environs with which they share a symbiotic relationship, social activists said.

“The entire thing looks like serving the interests of the US, China and Japan.

While the Americans are in great need of aluminium for their multi-billion dollar defence industry, the mammoth manufacturing sectors of China and Japan have constantly been on

the look out for cheap iron ore,” Mr. Ashok Maridas of Grassroots Media said.

The tribal districts of Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra are destinations of very big investments, mostly in aluminium, steel and iron plants and mining projects. About 80 per cent of India’s minerals and 70 per cent of forests are within tribal areas. As is the case already, the tribal-inhabited forests have become cradles of heavy industries, which some of them, are serving as unorganised and unskilled labourers. Of late, tribals are joining as domestic helps in India’s growing cities.

While the new Mining Policy intends to welcome foreign and private investment in the name of “upgradation or transfer of latest technology,” the existing acts have had amply proven that neither the implied policy, nor its implementation has helped tribals. The Land Acquisition Act 1894 is still being used to legally take over tribal lands in the name of national interest. The Indian Forests Act, 1927, which became the main legal instrument for depriving the tribals of their rights even over the minor forest produce.

Asian Age, 6 August 2007



Exploitation: Childhood lost in Bt cotton fields of Gujarat

In the Bt cotton farms in Idar taluka in Sabarkantha district it is pollination time for the crop. And so, tribal children shepherded by contractors have started the familiar journey south from Banswara, Dungarpur and Udaipur districts of Rajasthan. Over the past few years thousands of children have been extensively employed in the manual pollination of Bt cotton in the farms of north Gujarat.

In Sherpur, Laloda, Ganeshpura, Hassanpura and other villages in Idar taluka, the first lot of children has arrived. Their day begins early around 4 am when the cotton flower buds are open and at their tender best. It will end only late in the afternoon. Nirmala, who does not look any older than 12, says: "I arrived here about a week ago from my village in Dungarpur, Rajasthan. My job is to cross-pollinate the flowers for which I get Rs. 40 a day."

This Rs. 40 is not only less than the minimum wage of Rs. 50, but she will also not be paid directly. The contractor here must have paid her father a lumpsum for employing her as an agricultural labour for a couple of months.

The tribal children from Rajasthan, primarily in the age group of 10 to 15, come mainly to work in Sabarkantha and Banaskantha districts of Gujarat. The children work for more than 10 hours everyday and stay in makeshift shelters in the middle of the farm. There are a good number of girls here and the working conditions make them vulnerable to abuse.

The GKMS campaign against child labour last year has had the opposite effect. The farmers now deny that they employ children and the children have also been asked not to talk to anyone.

Ahmedbhai, of Laloda village has children working in his cotton fields. When asked he responded with: "I don't employ children for work. The children come with their parents." Sanju,

Why is child labour preferred in Bt cotton farms?

- Children with small fingers are more suited to pollinate male and female Bt cotton flowers. The children first scour the field identifying and tagging all female cotton flowers. Plucked male cotton flowers are then used to pollinate them.
- Child labour is cheap compared to adults who demand more money to do the tedious job of locating male and female cotton flowers and the delicate task of pollinating them.
- Children from Rajasthan don't demand holidays until the season is over and they return home.

working on the same farm and just a wee bit taller than the cotton plant, says: "My parents are in my village in Banswara. I came here all alone." The GKMS has been meeting the farmers and telling them to stop employing children.

However, State Rural Labour Commissioner K Ninama too denies anything wrong. "There are hardly any children under the age of 14 working there. We found eight such children and have sent them back to Rajasthan. We will be conducting inspections every 15 days. I don't think many children work there," he says.

Since, agricultural work does not come under the list of hazardous occupation children under 14 can be employed provided they do not work for more than three hours preceded by a rest of one hour and have weekly holidays.

Indian Express, 30 August 2007

PAKISTAN

The national workshop on “Caste-based discrimination in Pakistan,” took place on 3 June in Karachi, organised by the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (Piler) and the Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP). The workshop was attended by about 40 participants, including Dalit community representatives, NGOs, political leaders, academics, researchers and activists.

The research team leader, Zulfiqar Shah, presented the initial findings of his study carried out on 5,000 households which were mainly carried out in four districts – two in lower Punjab and two in lower Sindh. It is estimated that about two million scheduled caste people are among the poorest of the poor and are discriminated against in day to day life. Scheduled caste communities include the Kolhi, Meghwar, Bheel, Balmiki, Oad, Jogi, Bagri and other communities.

Extract from BBC report on the workshop:

“The survey revealed that the worst form of discrimination — from both upper caste Hindus and Muslims — came in the shape of untouchability, which means they were denied access to public places like restaurants, barber shops, etc. In some places they were served in separate crockery and in other areas they were even denied entry to certain restaurants and shops. They had segregated housing, while the situation is worse in rural areas as 95 per cent of Dalits living in Rahimyar Khan reported untouchability as compared to 35 per cent living in Multan. Sixty-nine per cent of those surveyed said that their upper caste Hindu and Muslim neighbours either do not invite them to their social gatherings like weddings, or if invited they are served food separately. This attitude was relatively more prevalent in Rahimyar Khan (87 per cent) than in Tharparkar (60 per cent).

The study claims that only one per cent of scheduled caste people were in government service, that also in the lowest tiers like primary school teachers. The illiteracy level in Dalits

stood at 73 per cent against the national literacy level of around 50 per cent. The majority of these literates are educated up to the primary or secondary school levels, while only one per cent were graduates.

Approximately 56 per cent of Dalit families live in single-room katcha houses, while 35 per cent reported the death of a child under 5 years in their families. The data showed that they were ignored by the political groups and government; hence they were unable to reap any benefits from the devolution plan. They also faced economic exploitation and the majority of bonded labourers in Sindh are from the scheduled castes.

The research revealed that very little information was available on the status of issues being faced by marginalised groups like the scheduled castes. Also, there was no legal protection or affirmative action policy to combat caste-based discrimination in Pakistan, unlike in India.”

At the end of the workshop, the participants made a series of recommendations:

A national commission should be set up to solve the problems faced by the scheduled castes;

Caste-based discrimination be declared a serious crime;

A constitutional package and protection for scheduled castes should be provided.

Special measures should be taken to stop forced conversions of scheduled caste girls and an independent commission should be formed to investigate the conversions.

Special scholarships must be provided to Dalit students and steps be taken to end the discrimination in schools against them, along with reforms in the curriculum.

Dalits should be given due representation at the decision-making levels so that they could protect their rights.

Hindustan Times, 11 May 2007

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka displaced vulnerable: report

A fact-finding mission on the state of the displaced persons in the north and east in Sri Lanka since the escalation of hostilities between the military and the LTTE over a year ago, has said the conflict has led to a “large scale shifting of population” that has become vulnerable to machinations of several actors in the field.

A comprehensive report by South Asians for Human Rights (SHAR) led by the former Prime Minister, I. K. Gujral, has concluded that the element of fear has had a major impact on the people and their lives in the regions.

“Most people said that the multiplicity of actors – GOSL, LTTE, TMVP and EPDP – made it difficult for them to negotiate the simplest activities on a day to day basis.

The mission found that despite such a high element of fear leading to the radicalisation of some sections of all communities, there were also individuals who had a nuanced and in-depth understanding of local realities and were firm in their belief that a negotiated settlement was the only way forward”, it said.

The mission says the internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are often used as pawns by both state and non-state actors, in clear violation of the basic principles of humanitarian law.

Target of criticism

It has said various agencies working among the IDPs and advocating on their behalf have also been the target of both warranted and unwarranted criticism, and at times intimidation and harassment.

The report said the increase in the activities of the LTTE splinter group Tamil Makkala Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP)/Karuna Group has also had an impact on displacement, return and resettlement.

“Further, continued internecine violence within the Tamil armed groups such as the reported split within the TMVP, (where commander Pillayan issued a warning to Karuna to leave the group or face being removed by force), only added to prevailing insecurity in the region and heightened”.

The Hindu, 16 August 2007



‘Lanka guilty of rights abuse’

US-based watchdog, Human Rights Watch, on Monday criticised the Sri Lankan government for a “disturbing rise” in abductions and “disappearances,” in a report that coincided with the visit of a top UN official to the country to discuss the island’s deepening conflict and the plight of civilians caught in violence.

The group said it had documented a dramatic increase in abuses by the forces of the Mahinda Rajapakse government over the past 18 months, and called on the country’s donors and concerned governments to support a United Nations monitoring mission in Sri Lanka.

“The Sri Lankan government has apparently given its security forces a green light to use ‘dirty war’ tactics,” said Brad Adams, Asia director, Human Rights Watch in a 129-page report titled Return to war: Human Rights Under Siege.

“The government has repeatedly promised to end and investigate abuses, but has shown a lack of political will to take effective steps. Government institutions have proven unable or unwilling to deal with the scale and intensity of abuse,” Mr. Adams further said.

Human Rights Watch said that more than 1,100 new cases were reported within 18 months since January 2006. The vast majority of them are Tamils. While the Tamil Tigers has long been responsible for abductions, the majority of recent “disappearances” implicate government forces or paramilitary groups acting with the government’s support.

In the northern Jaffna peninsula alone, an area under strict military control, more than 800 people were reported missing between December 2005 and April 2007 and 241 of whom were subsequently found. In many cases,

witnesses and family members allege that security forces were involved or implicated in the abduction.

The report of Human Rights Watch came in the midst of a visit by UN under-secretary-general John Holmes for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordination to Sri Lanka. It also came close to the first year commemoration of the August 2006 massacre of 17 local aid workers of the French aid group, Action Contre la Faim (ACF), also known as “Action Against Hunger,” in Muttur, near the eastern port city of Trincomalee.

In that incident, the aid workers, comprising 16 Tamils and one Muslim, found themselves trapped in sudden fighting between the Sri Lanka

forces and the LTTE. Their bodies were found with injuries that suggested execution-style killing.

Mr. Holmes is scheduled to hold talks with Sri Lankan leaders including President Rajapakse and also travel to the northern and eastern regions, according to foreign ministry officials. However, the government has refused him permission to visit the LTTE-controlled Kilinochchi.

Media access to Mr. Holmes has also been restricted during his visit to Jaffna and Batticaloa. On Monday he attended the first year commemoration of the Muttur massacre held at the UN compound in Colombo.

The Asian Age, 7 August 2007



BANGLADESH

Vacuum spreads in Dhaka

One of the prime concerns of an able physician is to ensure that the curative process applied to an ailing patient does not end up being harmful. Bangladesh has been politically ailing for some time now and the grave symptoms of 30 people killed in political clashes that followed former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Khaleda Zia’s term in October 2006 meant the nation being wheeled into the intensive care unit, courtesy the military-backed interim government. Ms. Zia’s arrest in Dhaka on Monday on charges of corruption follows the arrest of her arch-rival and another former PM, Sheikh Hasina, on extortion charges in July. In other words, the two key players of mainstream Bangladeshi politics are behind bars. The interim government has been in this sort of spring cleaning mode ever since. The question is with a December 2008 elections tentatively scheduled by the very same spring-cleaners, will there be anyone left to participate in the democratic process when it returns repaired and sparkling?

There is not doubt that it was necessary to clean the stables. The levels of corruption and strong-

arm tactics evident from both sides of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) – Awami League divide was growing in intensity, making not only Bangladesh reel in anarchy but also destabilising the entire region. It would be premature to state whether the vacuum-cleaning process underway till result in a clean State by December 2008.

But what worries many, both within Bangladesh and around the region including India, is the political vacuum that is liable to be filled by ‘non-mainstream’ political forces. Ms. Zia’s BNP’s alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh and the Islami Oikya Jote allowed the Islamicist voices to grow stronger. When seen in the context of the suspected links with organisations like the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, the matter of the present political vacuum becomes important. The enforced disengagement of the political classes in Bangladesh should not end up with the entrenchment of forces that could be much more dangerous to the country and the region.

Hindustan Times, 5 September 2007



The Life and Days of (Dalit) Sweepers in Bangladesh

Dirt, garbage, foul smell and nasty bio-products are part of their lives

*Muzibur Rahman Masud,
Daily Jugantor, Bangladesh*

Around 3.5 million Dalit sweepers across Bangladesh including the capital have been living through inhuman and sub-standard existence amid unbearable pains, enormous sufferings, and serious accommodation problems. The sweepers, one of the 44 scheduled caste communities, are the most neglected section of the society. Their reserved colonies are being occupied by musclemen. Deprived of all civic amenities including education and health care services their condition is excruciating without electricity, drinking water and supply of gas. The shanties are unhygienic and consequently, their children suffer from diseases. While working at night the female sweepers are frequently sexually harassed as the City Corporations and police stations hardly take actions against the culprits despite repeated complaints; rather, they are oppressed by the authorities.

The Telegu and Kanpuri speaking sweepers have no educational or health centre in their colonies. The pregnant sweepers have no maternity leave and there are no maternity or mother care facilities in the colony. There are a few primary schools without adequate language teachers. The government's slogan 'Education for All' carries little value in the colonies and therefore, some Dalits send their children to nearby schools and colleges changing their identity and address. There is barely any space to walk or enough drainage system in the colonies leading them in deep frustration. Various memorandums containing their range of demands have been submitted to the authorities, even to the Prime Minister but with no results. Pleadings to the Mayor of Dhaka, Sadek Hossain Khoka and Local Government and Co-operatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan have fallen in deaf years.

They lead an impoverished life bereft of any enjoyment. Having no money for colourful function during the ceremonies and festivals, they join the members of the Santal community who

arrange pleasure-festival along with liquor and ganja following the death of a Santal. Connecting to the function cheerfully, they enjoy it considering death as a freedom or detachment of human beings from all types of sufferings and liberating them from all hardships and problems. On the other hand, they arrange a weeklong mourning programme after the birth of a child considering that the newborn would face enormous sufferings during his/her lifetime.

Here are some of the experiences shared by the Ganoktuli, Dayaganj, Dhalpur, Sutrapur, Agargaon and Mohammadpur sweeper colonies.

Ganoktuli Sweeper Colony with a lac sweeper is located on 20 acres of land beside the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) Headquarters at Pilkhana. Although the colony was erected only for sweepers, the local gang lords-musclemen-traders have occupied a major portion with local influential persons forcibly capturing about two acres of the colony land.

The residents of the colony co-exist with foul smell of dirt and garbage. Amid scarcity of drinking water, there are only 4 to 5 water taps in the entire colony - where daylong queues are not uncommon - serving as baths and also as collection centre of drinking water amid no separate arrangement for the females. The dustbin is located in front of the houses and small boys and girls respond to nature's call on the roadside drains. These kids and band of pigs play together. The residents wash their utensils with drain water and in the company of mosquitoes and flies gathering on the dirt, there is scarcely any fresh air to breathe due to congested surroundings. Over 100 make-shift centres of country liquor, ganja, drugs and heroin exist outside the colony giving rise to violence centred on the drug business. None dare to protest since the local musclemen sheltered under law and order enforcing authorities run the trade.

There is no health care centre in the colony and only a primary school with limited scope of education as there is no teacher to teach their language. Lashkar, a member of the Dalit community alleged that their children are neglected and harassed in the school resulting in a loss of interest and, with the availability of drugs the juveniles and teenagers turn drug addicts pursuing a vagabond life exploited by the musclemen.

Dayaganj Sweeper Colony is located in the old part of the city where around 50,000 sweepers reside with fear and uncertainty. Large parts have already been occupied by the miscreants and they rest under eviction threat. Some of the sweepers have already left the colony facing threat from musclemen. The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) authorities have built a market there evicting the sweepers. A rampant drug trade operates under local influential groups utilising the sweepers. Police officials frequently arrest the innocents while the influential remain untouched. Lack of electricity, supply of water and other basic amenities with rampant garbage and dirt and huge congestion make sweepers helpless human being.

Agargaon PWD Sweeper Colony is in a small area with a thousand sweeper families near Dhaka Orthopaedic Hospital where normal breathing is impossible due to extreme congestion. Shanties erected by bamboo and sacks received an eviction notice which does not give any reason. The families pay 2 takas per day to the local police for staying there. The musclemen of nearby BNP Basti run a drug trade using the sweepers. The entire western side of the colony is already occupied by the miscreants collecting tolls from the sweepers for staying in their own colonies.

The situation is comparatively better at Dhalpur Sweeper Colony nevertheless sweepers are now under threat. Around 2000 families of Kanpuri speaking sweepers live on 6.7 acres of land. At least 200 houses have already been captured by the influential local people. Many of them have already left the colony under threat from local

gang lords and influential political leaders. A rampant drug trading centre with scarcity of electricity and pure drinking water is a common picture.

About 1000 sweepers live in Mohammadpur Sweeper Colony with 200 dwellings of different shapes with large areas captured by miscreants turning it into dens of drug peddlers. The picture is squalid like other colonies.

Apart from these colonies, there are a good number of Hindu Dalits living at Mirpur, Shyampur, Gulshan, Islampur and Badda.

President of Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights B G Murti complained that in spite of being citizens who fought for the independence of the country, they are still considered as untouchables. He claimed that about 35 lacs of sweepers and lower caste people like cobblers and iron smiths have been staying all over the country with inadequate nutrition, job prospect and living conditions. He alleged that they are being ousted from their colonies and the authorities turn blind to that. The sweepers have no permanent job working on daily basis. There is no leave for a single day and they are forced to work even during festivals, with a meagre salary. A large number in different colonies are infected by critical diseases and drug addiction is very high.

Shamsul Huda, Executive Director of Alliance for Development Support & Cooperation, a rare organisation working with Dalits stated that the constitution grants a lot of rights to them but the community is far from attaining it.

According to the agreement of international convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination (CERD) the government is bound to fulfil the basic needs of employment, housing, education and health care of the lower castes however, the reality is contradictory.

During the British regime about 50 sweeper families were sent to Dhaka from Kanpur, Nagpur and Andhra provinces who were initially appointed as sweeper to the Dhaka Samity. Later, more sweepers came from those provinces.

BNPS organized Training Course on “Gender Responsive Budgeting”

Gender Thematic Focal Organization of SAAPE, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) organized 4 days long Training Workshop on “Gender Budgeting: A framework for Women Empowerment and Social accountability” was held on 6-9 August 2007. A total of 25 NGOs, Government and Media’s senior/ mid level personals who are directly involved with policy making, strategic planning and execution were participated in the training workshop. It is very important to increase awareness and knowledge of the policy makers, especially who are directly involved in the budget making process, academia, media personnel and civil society. In this context, BNPS planned to organize the training course for the senior and mid level NGO activist, media people and other relevant interested govt. sector people to make them aware and sensitize on the issue. BNPS also realized that the range of Gender Budget analysis should equally be perceived as a mandate to examine from gender perspective not only for government national budget but also in NGO sector. In this perspective BNPS propose to introduce the practice of Gender budgeting in NGO sector so that they use it as a strategy for improving their gender sensitivity and efficiency in the field of their development efforts.

The training course content:

- Key concepts of gender budgeting
- Why gender responsive budgeting
- Evaluation of gender budgeting

- History and relevance of gender responsive budgeting
- Practice of gender responsive budgeting
- Sharing of different findings on gender budgeting in Bangladesh context
- Gender audit policies
- Significance of gender budgeting in NGO programme
- Strategies framework of gender budgeting activities
- Required capacity of gender budgeting
- Different tools and techniques for gender responsive budgeting
- Discussion on GRB in specific NGO context, Local Govt. and national context.

Both Government and NGO experts facilitated the sessions including Ms. Rokeya Kabir, Dr. Farzana Naim, Ms. Jowshan Ara Rahman, Dr. Atiur Rahman, Ms. Kalyani Menon Sen, Dr. Kaniz Siddique, Ms. Sheepa Hapiza shared their knowledge and experience over the theme. Dr. Akbar ali Khan, former advisor of caretaker government of Bangladesh, was present as a chief guest in the closing session. Gender budgeting training news also put in the web-side of www.bnps.org. Most of the participants expressed their views to BNPS to form a starring committee and lead the follow-up activities of the participating organizations. BNPS is the pioneer of Bangladesh to introduce this type of training course.



Nepal

Future tense in Nepal

Maoist withdrawal may affect peace process

The Maoists’ withdrawal from Nepal’s government has plunged the country into political uncertainty. Their decision to take to the streets to demand “republicanism” as a pre-requisite for the November 22 Constituent Assembly election has put a question mark over the holding of the poll itself. Nepal last saw a general election in 1999.

Ram Chandra Poudel, Minister for Peace and reconstruction, said the Maoist pullout – and expected launch of an agitation – had put Nepal’s interim constitution, promulgated on January 15, at risk.

“It will badly affect the ongoing peace process in

Nepal,” Poudel said, adding the Maoist decision would also have a negative impact on the election process.

Moist leader Baburam Bhattarai’s speech at the Tudikhel ground made it obvious that the party would now aim to derail the election process. Bhattarai said the election code of conduct, which came into effect on Tuesday, was not acceptable to the Maoists.

Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist), criticized the Maoists for withdrawing from the government and claimed the rebels would be blamed if the peace process was derailed.

Analysts feel the Maoists may not have timed their decision well. Prime Minister Girija Prasad

Koirala is under international pressure to hold the election. And the Maoists are signatories to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which says that the political future of the 238-year-old monarchy would be decided by the Constituent Assembly.

Nepal already faces considerable political disturbance. There is a growing demand for the right to self-determination in the Terai, and over 150 lives have been lost in violent protests. Law and order in the region has been undermined by a mushrooming of insurgent outfits – at least 21 disgruntled groups have taken up arms in the past one year alone. And senior police officers feel insurgency will feed on continuing political turmoil.

Hindustan Times, 19 September 2007

Time Line

January 2007: Maoists re-enter Parliament

April 2006: Strikes and protests are called by opposition parties to end monarchy.

February 2006: Amnesty International calls on Gyanendra to release nearly 900 activists held in the run-up to the first anniversary of his seizure of power.

January 2006: Around 150,000 people take part in one of the largest anti-monarchy rally to date in Nepal.

April 2005: The king lifts the state of emergency.

February 2005: King Gyanendra declares state of emergency and assumes total power, appointing a new cabinet loyal to the Monarchy and unveiling a roadmap he says would put Nepal on track to democracy in three years.

December 2004: Over 800 people die this month alone.

Amnesty International reports a “dramatic escalation” in the number of “disappearances,” some 378 just in 2004.

May 2004: Thapa resigns following prolonged street protests by opposition groups.

January 2004: Rebels and government declare ceasefire, which the Rebels pull out of 7 months later.

May/June 2003: Chand resigns as prime minister. King appoints his own nominee Surya Bahadur Thapa as new premiere.

2002: Violent clashes between military and rebels. Parliament dissolved and fresh elections are called.

November 2001: Maoists end truce and King Gyanendra declares a state of emergency after more than 100 people are killed in four days of violence.

July 2001: Maoists intensify a campaign of violence. Prime Minister Deuba announces peace with rebels and truce begins.

June 2001: Crown Prince Dipendra guns down his parents King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya and seven other members of the royal family before killing himself. His brother Gyanendra accedes to the throne.

Bhutan

7,000 refugees may fly to US by September 2008

US names IOM as OPE in Nepal

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), which was selected as the Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) to assist in the screening of the Bhutanese refugees before they migrate to the United States (US), has started setting up delayed operations in Damak.

However, "significant processing" of the applications will start only at the end of September, while only 7,000 Bhutanese refugees have a chance of flying to the US by September 2008.

This indicates that the task of processing 60,000 refugees from the total of 107 thousand, which the US expressed willingness to take, could take about nine years. The process of screening the refugees by hiring a specialised agency goes back to February last and is running behind by a month due to what has been described as the "unsettled" conditions in refugee camps in Damak.

Going by the initial schedule, the task of setting up the operations was supposed to get underway by July 1 before the OPE "assumed responsibility for the small existing caseload by Wednesday, August 1."

This has translated into a delay by one month from September 1, a deadline by which the IOM

was initially scheduled to start what has been identified as the "significant processing."

"The agency which was selected to process the cases is IOM. It was initially scheduled to start operations earlier on, but unstable conditions in Damak ruled that out. The task of setting up operations is going on now," spokesperson for the US embassy in Kathmandu, Sharon Hudson-Dean, told The Himalayan Times.

Sharon-Dean also said that "since the process is a lengthy affair, not more than 7,000 refugees may get to enter the US by September 2008, indicating that the prospect of the 107 thousand Bhutanese refugees starting a new life in the US could take "several years." The IOM was selected as the OPE by the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, Office of Admissions, under the US Department of State to facilitate migration of the refugees from Nepal to the US earlier in the year following a process which got underway on February 1.

The bureau has entered into what has been identified as a "cooperative" agreement with the IOM for the period from July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008, with the guarantee to renew the same for any number of years.

The Himalayan Times, 29 July 2007

GENERAL NEWS

The protest against G8 Summit at Rostock, Germany

The 33rd G8 summit took place at Kempinski Grand Hotel in Heiligendamm in the old Duchy of Mecklenburg in the Northern German state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern on the Baltic Coast, from June 6 to June 8, 2007. The annual summits are the most visible element of the G8 process. "Growth and responsibility" - these were the central themes of Germany's G8 presidency. Shaping globalization and helping Africa to develop were the key focuses of the summit.

For people in South Asia following the G-8 events from such a distance, the coverage of the anti-G8 protests both in the television and the print media has been dominated by news of violent clashes between police and some protesters.

Around 1,00,000 people from across Germany and from other countries gathered in Rostock to protest against the recent G8 summit, opposing the neo-liberal agenda of the G8 leaders, which has led to massive poverty throughout the underdeveloped world, increasingly bloody occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq and a global environmental crisis.

A huge demonstration on the 2nd of June marked the opening of the protests with participants raising slogans against neo-liberalism, persecution of immigrants, illegitimate debt, etc. On the 4th of June, a protest took place in defence of immigrants' rights even though it was declared illegal by the police. On 6 June, 10,000 protesters succeeded in breaking through police lines and blockading the G8, forcing the opening of the summit to be postponed.

The Alternative Summit took place from June 5–7. Additionally, there were various connected events focused on specific topics. The alternatives to the politics of the G8 were presented and discussed in public. There were panels and workshops on issues like Global Justice, Environment, Climate and Energy, Strategies and Alternatives, War and Militarization, Migration and Racism, Labour and Social Issues, Education and Gender and Debt. The workshops attracted thousands of

participants keen on exchanging ideas and undertaking collective efforts on answers to the many remaining questions

It is hardly a revelation that the media chooses to report on this rather than on the huge numbers of peaceful protesters, their message of opposition to the G8 and their wish to see an end to war, poverty and all other oppression.

The majority of the brutality in today's world is committed at the hands of those very G8 leaders. Over 655,000 civilian deaths in Iraq, 70 wars in the last two decades or so, and close to \$ 844 billion¹ spent on arms in 2007 alone by governments in the G8.

During the G8 clashes on 2 June, over five hundred protesters were injured, 165 arrested and there were over 400 injuries to police. However, demonstration organisers estimated that there were over 80,000 anti-G8 protesters in total and that the clashes, involving a minority, were not a major feature until after the end of the march.

The escalation of police repression² against anti-G8 demonstrators during the Summit with columns of police marching down the sides of the demonstration and police helicopters hovering above were not unexpected if one follows the incidents of raids on the organizers of the protests at Berlin, Hamburg and other cities much before the Summit took place. However the extent of the police aggression was much greater than predicted. Dozens of water cannon and police vans sped through the streets and the sound of sirens was constant. At a protest in Hamburg in the week before the G8, the police used pepper spray on those protesting outside a meeting of international finance ministers. In the weeks preceding the 2 June demonstration there were raids on the offices and homes of left-wing activists across Germany in an attempt to limit the expression of anger against the G8 leaders and to discredit anti-G8 protesters as 'extremists'. This appears to have backfired somewhat as following these attacks there was

a sharp increase in participation at Rostock. Another consequence, however, was to create the false impression that advocates of anarchistic ideas were the main opposition to the G8. In order to keep Heiligendamm out of the reach of protesting masses an enormous wall costing 12.5 million euros has been built to 'protect' the summit. Shops and other businesses in Rostock were urged to remain shut against the risk of damage from the protesters. Such measures have been taken to discredit and intimidate those who wish to demonstrate their anger.

Despite this high level of repression and the random and arbitrary arrests³ of thousands of protesters during the week the mobilisations in Rostock were a great success. Both in the alternative summit and in the blockades, diverse movements met, discussed and acted together to oppose the G8 destructive policies and give life to alternatives. The three camps in Rostock, Reddelich and Wichmannsdorf were living examples of solidarity and sustainable, joyful and self-organized communities where more than 20.000 people lived together during about a week.

Agenda and declarations

There was some confusion about the agenda since at the end of the 32nd G8 summit in Russia, German Chancellor Angela Merkel reported that the agenda of the G8 summit in 2007 had not been determined, but "the struggle against poverty across the globe will be a priority."⁴

According to the official German Presidency website, the summit's motto was "Growth and Responsibility," focusing on "Investment, Innovation and Sustainability", and "Africa: good governance, sustainable investment, peace and security".⁵ Transparency of the financial markets, intellectual property and energy efficiency were also to be on the agenda, as well as talks about climate change.

However, every year and at every summit the G8 has been at ease with empty announcements with no intention to put them into practice.

The G8 repeated the promise made at Gleneagles in 2005, namely that aid subsidies would double by 2010 to Africa, hence, nothing new was announced at Rostock. However, according to the OECD and the World Bank, aid to Africa irrespective of debt relief had fallen in 2006. On the other hand the \$ 60 billion promised

to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, without any specific deadline, had already partly been announced over the past months and thus, hardly anything new. Looking at the ground realities at Africa we find that the health sector is severely deteriorating and the number of starving people is steadily rising. It is important to note that in 1970 rich countries had committed to spend 0.7 % of their GNP to development aid but, nearly 40 years later, their actual spending is only 0.26%.

On the issue of climate change, the G8 was content with saving face without confronting the environmental reality of the coming decades. A token acknowledgment of the need to substantially reduce greenhouse gas emission will not have any impact since the eight countries did not specify any explicit common point even though they are responsible for most emissions while people in developing countries suffer the consequences.

As to the resumption of the Doha Round within the WTO, the G8 claims it is necessary for the development of poor countries whereas the logic of these negotiations, in perfect accordance with the Structural Adjustment Policies implemented since the 1980s is deeply harmful to poor people in the developing countries..

It is not only in the poorest countries of Africa and Asia that deprivation exists. In the richest country on the planet, the US, 60 million people live on less than \$7 a day. Here in Germany as well as in advanced industrialised countries the workers and youth have seen their living conditions deteriorate massively as huge attacks are made on wages and working conditions and there have been massive cuts in public services and social security

To sum it up, it was pitiful to see eight heads of state secluded in an overprotected place with impressive armed forces officially flouting citizens' freedom of movement and right to peaceful protest pretending they rejoice in non-existent advances. The poor across the globe has no hope from the Summit rather, fear about their future with the leaders of the G8 specifically acting in the interest of the elites and rich jeopardizing the lives and livelihood of billions across the world.

- 1 \$ 843.69 billion. Figures for Italy are of 2006. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_military_expenditures
- 2 The city of Rostock witnessed the deployment of 13,000 police force from all over Germany and 1,000 soldiers to combat the protesters.
- 3 We were at a temporary prison near the Rostock camp at Bramow on June 4th, 2007

since a number of our friends from the debt cancellation movement had been arrested and witnessed the police bringing hundreds of arrested people every half an hour.

- 4 <http://en.g8russia.ru/news/20060717/1250596.html>
- 5 <http://www.g-8.de/Webs/G8/EN/Agenda/agenda.html>



N-deal will spell doom for NPT: Chomsky

Noam Chomsky, the world's foremost linguist better known for the trenchant criticism of the US foreign policy, has once again played the Bush administration – this time for the India–US civil nuclear agreement.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) professor, who has been named in several opinion polls as the most important public intellectual alive, has issued a statement, titled 'Why we oppose the Indo-US military ties', which is also signed by seven noted Left-leaning intellectuals. Terming the India-US nuclear co-operation agreement as "capstone" of the new bilateral strategic alliance, the statement doing rounds on blogs this week says they oppose the deal for three related reasons:

- (1) "The deal is another attempt by the Bush administration to weaken the framework of international law." They note, "India refused to sign the (Nuclear) Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 because, it claimed, the NPT put into place a hierarchy between nuclear weapons states and non-nuclear weapons states. Now, the US government is playing kingmaker, pretending that it is in a lawful position to welcome India into the nuclear weapons club."
- (2) "The deal will intensify the instability of the South Asian subcontinent," Noting the confidence-building measures undertaken by India and Pakistan in recent years, Mr. Chomsky and others say: "One of the means to build confidence in the region was the creation of a natural gas pipeline from Iran through Pakistan into India. The 'peace pipeline' would have tied the region

together and raised the stakes for negotiations over belligerence." They are unhappy with the nuclear deal because "the peace pipeline is a casualty of this agreement". Moreover, "the nuclear deal does nothing to hamper the Indian nuclear weapons sector, whose growth will fuel an arms race with Islamabad and Beijing".

- (3) "The deal is intended as a part of the Bush administration's wish to isolate Iran. It is by now clear that the US 'coerced' India's votes at the International Atomic Energy Agency meetings of September 2005 and February 2006". They point out that the Hyde Act passed by the US Congress in 2006 "specially demanded that the US government 'secure India's full and active participation in US efforts to dissuade, isolate and, if necessary, sanction and contain Iran for its efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction". Mr. Chomsky, along with Naomi Klein, Howard Zinn, Medea Benjamin, Judith LeBlanc, Mike Davis, John Bellamy Foster and Vijay Prashad, has urged "the US population to reject this agreement". This is not the first time Mr. Chomsky, in his large number of interviews, talks, articles and blog entries, has opposed the growing bonhomie between Washington and New Delhi.

In an interview in April on India-Pakistan relations, he had noted: "The agreement with India was in serious violation of US law, the export law from early 1970s that was passed after the Indian test (of 1974). It was also in violation of the rules of the two major international organisations, one that controls, or tries to

control, nuclear material exports, the other that tries to control missile technology exports". Referring to the IAEA and the NSG, he said: "It's a sharp blow against two of the elements of the international system that's trying to prevent proliferation of nuclear technology, weapons technology, and missile technology. It was predictable that as soon as the US broke it, someone else would break it, too. And shortly after, China approached Pakistan with sort of a similar agreement.... Russia will probably do the same and others will do the same," he said in the interview conducted as part of a symposium

on the centenary of Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha movement.

In a talk delivered in Beirut in May, reproduced as "Imminent Crisis: Threats and Opportunities" in the June issue of Monthly Review, Mr. Chomsky said that "Bush's recent trip to India and his authorisation of India's nuclear weapons programme are part of the jockeying over how ... major global forces will crystallise" in planning for their energy needs.

Economic Time, 5 September 2007



Democracy, Pakistani style

By And For the Oligarchy

The feudalistic nature of Pakistan's polity makes it difficult to evaluate events in that country using normally acceptable standards of democratic functioning. The current long-drawn power struggle, for instance, underscores the complete absence of ethics on either side. Given the circumstances under which the presidential election was conducted, General Musharraf's victory – Which was neither constitutional nor moral – always seemed likely. It's doubtful whether the Supreme Court, which seems to have taken the 'middle path' after the verdict returning the Chief Justice to his office, will upset the General's plans in the hearings on the legality of his candidature that start on October 17. Musharraf, post re-election, continues to refuse ruling out declaring emergency if the judiciary disqualifies him. It is also questionable whether the 'troika' system envisaged by the General, with him as President, a loyal and US-backed army chief and Benazir Bhutto (possibly) as PM, can deliver the liberal politics that Pakistan desperately needs. With Islamic extremism assuming civil war proportions, the army suffering setbacks in operations against militants, and Ms. Bhutto, the 'liberal face', facing a severe

credibility gap, an effective secular front in Pakistan cannot be formed without the people's participation in a functional political democratic process. Indeed, the people of Pakistan face the continuation of an oligarchy determined to protect its own interests and those of its patrons. That the Oppositions' call for a strike on Saturday evoked such a poor response indicates the levels of disillusionment.

A few positive signs, however, seem to have emerged from the lawyer's movement. Its resonance among the people indicates that it has, perhaps uniquely in Pakistan, articulated a secular middle-class impulse to break with the past by not only limiting the army's role in politics and halting the erosion of institutions, but even redefining the country's image. At the very least, it forced the military regime to proceed with a new caution even as it went about subverting the democratic process. Genuine democracy is still a distant dream, and we hope a sense of disillusionment does not diminish the people's appetite to pursue that dream.

Economic Times, 9 October 2007



Climate change could trigger global food crisis

Experts issue warning at U. N. – backed forum on sustainable development

Climate change and an increasing population could trigger a global food crisis in the next half century as countries struggle for fertile land to grow crops and rear animals, scientists warned on Thursday. To keep up with the growth in human population, more food will have to be produced worldwide over the next 50 years than has been during the past 10,000 years combined, the experts said. But in many countries a combination of poor farming practices and deforestation will be exacerbated by climate change to steadily degrade soil fertility, leaving vast areas unsuitable for crops or grazing. Competition over sparse resources may lead to conflicts and environmental destruction, the scientists fear.

The warnings came as researchers from around the world convened at a United Nations-backed forum in Iceland on sustainable development to address the organisation's millennium development goals to halve hunger and extreme poverty by 2015. The researchers will use the meeting to call on countries to impose strict farming guidelines to ensure that soils are not degraded so badly they cannot recover.

"Policy changes that result in improved conservation of soil and vegetation and restoration of degraded land are fundamental to humanity's future livelihood," said Zafar Adeel, director of the international network on water, environment, and health and U. N. University and co-organiser of the meeting.

"This is an urgent task as the quality of land for food production, as well as water storage, is fundamental to future peace. Securing food and reducing poverty ... can have a strong impact on efforts to curb the flow of people, environmental refugees, inside countries as well as across national borders," he added.

The U.N. millennium ecosystem assessment ranked land degradation among the world's

greatest environmental challenges, claiming it risked destabilising societies, endangering food security and increasing poverty.

Some 40 per cent of the world's agricultural land is seriously degraded. Among the worst affected regions are Central America, where 75 per cent of the land is infertile, Africa, where a fifth of the soil is degraded, and Asia, where 11 per cent of the land is unsuitable for farming.

Soil erosion

The majority of soil erosion is caused by water, either through flooding or poor irrigation, with the rest lost to winds. Farming practices such as ploughing also damage soil, as does repeated planting in fields, which depletes the soil of nutrients.

"You can sum it up as need, greed and ignorance," said Andrew Campbell, an Australian environmental consultant. "Some pressures on soil resources come from simple human needs, where people don't have any option but to grow crops or farm animals. But in other instances world markets demand produce, so farmers try to meet those markets. And sometimes, there will be land that's cleared that should not have been, or grazed when it shouldn't have been. All these place great pressures on soil resources."

He warned that increased competition over depleted resources would lead to conflict – "and the losers will inevitably be the environment and poor people."

Andres Arnalds, of the Icelandic soil conservation service, said the pressures on food production would have knock-on effects all over the world because of the international links in food supply.

Mr. Campbell said: "If we can improve agricultural practices across the board we can dramatically increase our food production from existing lands, without having to clear more or put more pressure on soils."

"Simple things like good crop rotation, sowing at the right time of year, basic weed control, are what is needed. They're very well known but not always used."

The Hindu, 1 September 2007

OBITUARY

A senior most leader of the Bhutanese Political movement, Mr Ran Bahadur Basnet, President of Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP) passed away on 18th August in Bir hospital, Kathmandu. He was suffering from liver problem for last couple of months.

The Prime Minister of Nepal expressed his condolence message through his representative Hon Minister Ram Chandra Poudyal. Dr Ram Sharan Mahat, finance Minister, Ram Baran Yadav, Chakra Pd Bastola and Mahesh Acharya were present to express their deep condolence to grieved Basnet family.

His body was put on pyre in Mai River in eastern Nepal yesterday in presence of his relatives and Bhutanese fellow brethren. A Shok Sabha (condolence message program) was organised by Party's General Secretary (organizational) Mr Hari Adhikari. Dr DNS Dhakal, Party's Founding General Secretary; Balaram Poudyal, President, Bhutan People's Party; Mr Tenzin Gawa Zangpo leader of Sarchop Community; Dr Bhampa Rai, social Activists; S.B.Subba, Chairman, HUROB; Mrs Jashoda Budathoki, President WOB; Menuka Nepal, Camp secretary; Rajendra Basnet, Nepali Congress (D); Rev Father Verkey, Field Director, CARITAS Nepal and Mohan Tamang, President Democratic Youth of Bhutan expressed their deep condolences on sad demise of Lt Mr Basnet.

He served under different capacities in Bhutan. Before he initiated a democratic movement, he was appointed as the Director General of State Trading Corporation of Bhutan by the former King which he refused to accept at the cost of sufferings of large chunk of Lhotshampas (Bhutanese) in the south Bhutan.

He is considered a key man behind the scene in building up strong Indo-Bhutan bilateral relation.

He studied in Scottosih Mission in Kalimpong, India and did is University Study in New Zealand before he joined in Royal Civil Service in 1972.

He is survived by his wife, Mrs Manikala Basnet, dughters Rupa, Rajni and Roma Basnet.

A traditional Hindu ceremony is being organized in Jhapa unitl 1st September.

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